Summer 2004

EDUCATION next

A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH

Multiple Intelligences

The making of a modern myth

DANIEL T. WILLINGHAM

IN THIS ISSUE:

School Reform in the UK, The Future of School Boards, Vouchers in Florida, Pell Grants for Kids, Portfolio Assessment, Do Schools Want New Leaders?

CONTRIBUTORS: LAMAR ALEXANDER, RICHARD BRIFFAULT, MICHAEL CASSERLY, SARAH GLOVER, JAY GREENE, WILLIAM HOWELL, LISA KEEGAN, JAY MATHEWS, ALEXANDER RUSSO, CHRISTOPHER WOODHEAD

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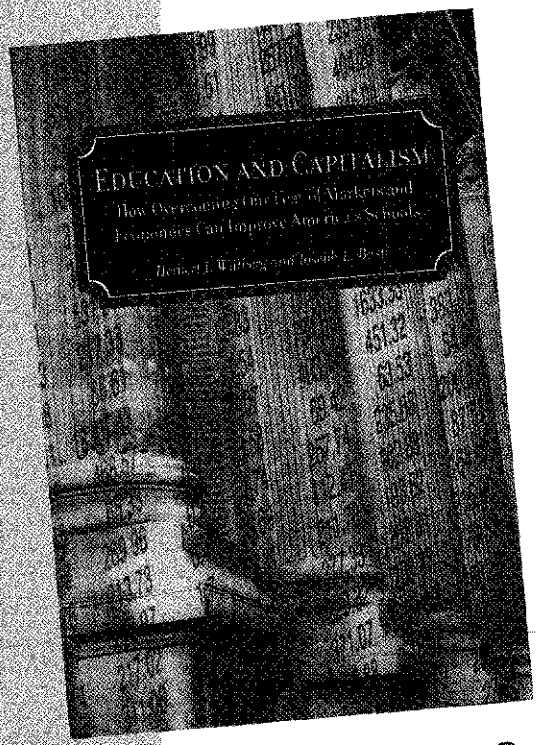

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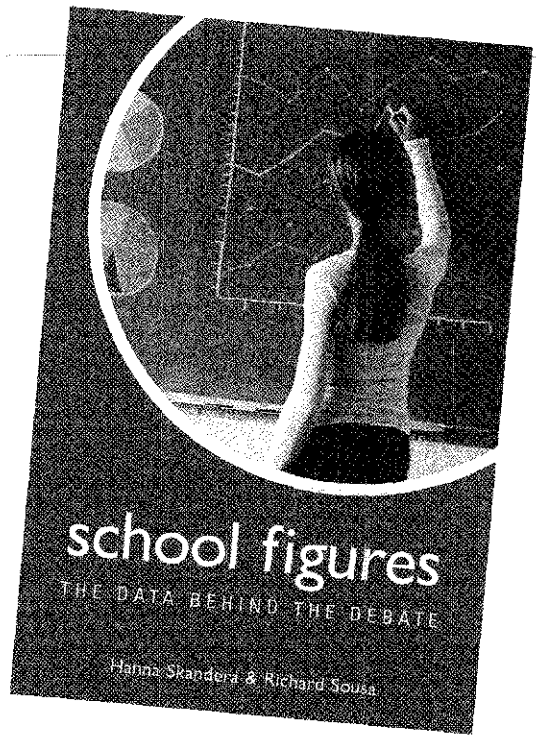

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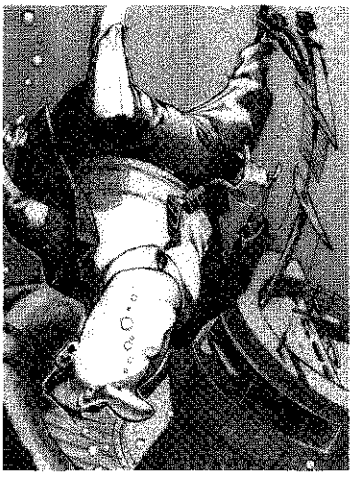

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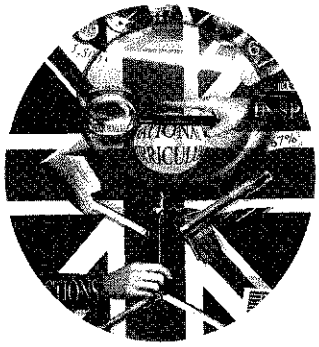

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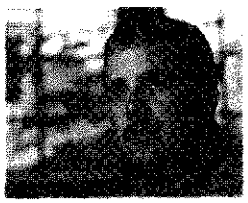

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By Frederick M. Hess

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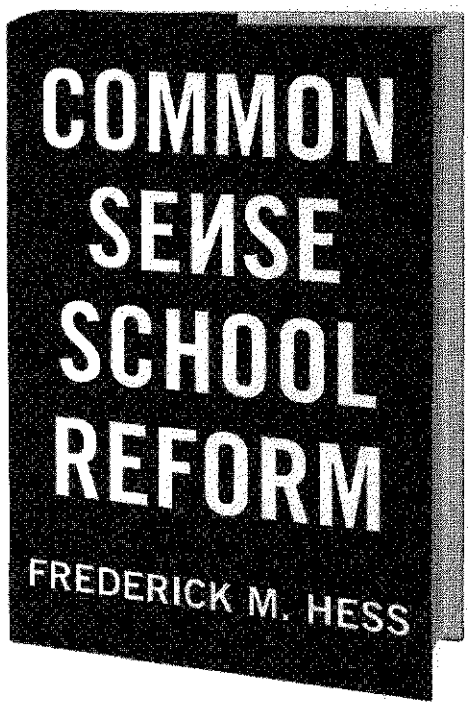

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The Concord Review

Since 1987, *The Concord Review*, the only quarterly journal in the world for the academic work of high school students, has published 57 issues with 627 history papers by students from 43 states and 33 other countries. Essays of around 5,500 words, with (Turabian) endnotes and bibliography, on any historical topic (ancient or modern, domestic or foreign), may be submitted, with a completed copy of the Form to Accompany Essays, and a check for $40 made out to The Concord Review, to: The Concord Review, 730 Boston Post Road, Suite 24, Sudbury, Massachusetts 01776. We publish about 8% of the essays we receive. William R. Fitzsimmons, Dean of Admissions at Harvard College, has said: "We have been very happy to have reprints of essays published in *The Concord Review*, submitted by a number of our applicants over the years, to add to the information we consider in making admission decisions...All of us here in the Admissions Office are big fans of *The Concord Review*."

National Writing Board

The National Writing Board, founded in 1998, has now given an independent, unbiased assessment of high school history papers from 28 states, and sent each author a three-page report, with scores and comments, which she/he has asked us to send to college admissions officers (at 69 colleges so far), or simply could use as feedback on one of her/his best history research papers. History research papers of two lengths—around 2,000 words, or around 5,000 words—with (Turabian) endnotes and bibliography, may be submitted, with a notarized Submission Form and a check for $100, made out to the National Writing Board, to: the National Writing Board, 730 Boston Post Road, Suite 24, Sudbury, Massachusetts 01776. Deadlines are November 1 and June 1 each year. The following colleges and universities now endorse this independent assessment service for academic writing: Amherst, Bowdoin, Carnegie Mellon, Claremont McKenna, Colgate, Connecticut College, Dartmouth, Duke, Eckerd, Emory, Georgetown, Hamilton, Harvard, Illinois Wesleyan, Lafayette, Lehigh, Michigan, Middlebury, Northwestern, Notre Dame, Pitzer, Princeton, Richmond, Sarah Lawrence, Spelman, Tufts, Trinity (CT), the University of Virginia, Washington and Lee, Williams, and Yale.

Ralph Waldo Emerson Prizes

The Emerson Prizes ($3,000) have now been awarded to 34 students, published in *The Concord Review*, who have shown outstanding academic promise in history at the high school level since 1995. The tenth annual award ceremony was hosted by The Horace Mann School in New York, on April 17, 2004. The five laureates this year were from Canada, Connecticut, New York, and Texas. Past laureates have come from Czechoslovakia, Colorado, Washington, D.C., Florida, California, Tennessee, Vermont, New Zealand, Utah, Massachusetts, Russia, Washington State, Louisiana, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maryland, Illinois, Japan, and New York.

National History Club

The National History Club, founded in 2002, now has more than 2,000 members in secondary school history club chapters in 29 states. Our Newsletter is online at http://www.tcr.org. Our goal is the promotion of the reading, writing, discussion, and pleasures of history among secondary school teachers and students of history. There is no fee for joining. If your school would like to apply for a charter, please send the names and addresses of all of your members and the faculty advisor to: Robert Nasson, Executive Director, National History Club, 730 Boston Post Road, Suite 24, Sudbury, MA 01776, email: nasson@tcr.org.

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The two different submission forms for *The Concord Review* and the National Writing Board may each be found on this website, which has had more than 238,000 visitors, and since 1997 has been mirrored on a server in Singapore for the use of history teachers in Asia. This site also has 60 sample essays, including all of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Prize winners from the last ten years, and information on the National History Club, now with chapters in 29 states. If you have any questions, please log on and leave a message for Will Fitzhugh at fitzhugh@tcr.org, or call (800) 331-5007.

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What Mandates?

School districts have little to gripe about

It's been said, more than once, that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is a mandate that the federal government has failed to fund. Not true, in either respect. The law is neither unfunded nor, with one exception, much of a mandate.

The funding question was put to rest by James Peyser and Robert Costrell in the Spring 2004 issue ("Exploring the Costs of Accountability," *Feature*). They showed that it costs but $20 to test a student, the only new activity NCLB requires all schools to do. Meanwhile, federal dollars have risen steadily since the law's passage; the average district now receives $300 more per pupil from Washington than it did in 2000.

Nor is NCLB, apart from its testing requirement, much of a mandate. To be sure, schools are expected to show adequate yearly progress toward state-determined goals, as measured by state-developed tests. If progress is not made, the school is said to be failing or, in the polite language of the federal Department of Education, "in need of improvement."

What are the consequences of failing? Not much.

But what are the consequences of failing? Not much. If a school fails for two years running, the only requirement is to let its students transfer to one of the district's nonfailing schools.

Students are not given the option of transferring to a private school or to a charter school outside the district's boundaries. Inner-city children are not given the choice of attending a suburban school. Students cannot move to a better school if it too is "in need of improvement." If every school in a district is failing, or if the district has only one school, children have no choices whatsoever.

According to the Council of Great City Schools, roughly 20 percent of big-city schools have been deemed "failing" (see the article by Michael Casserly on p. 32). This percentage is almost certain to increase, because the "adequate yearly progress" rule becomes more demanding each year. Unless schools improve—or states ease their academic standards—most big-city schools will soon be defined as failing. If every school is so designated, the choice mandate vanishes.

William Howell reports that over a fifth of the parents in failing schools would like to consider an alternative (see the article on p. 26). Since his data are from Massachusetts, a relatively high-scoring state, the parental demand could well be greater elsewhere.

Yet less than 1 percent of all students in failing schools have sought a transfer. Some hurdles (transportation costs, timing, and so forth) are practical. But many school districts appear to be obstructing the process by restricting the number of available choices and discouraging parents when they apply. As one Worcester, Massachusetts, official put it, "The feds told us we had to offer a choice, not the parents' choice, but a choice."

After three years of making inadequate progress, schools face another so-called mandate: Students must then be given the option of receiving free tutoring or other supplemental educational services. For this, the federal government is providing more than enough funds to pay current costs—and still more money is on its way.

Local districts can contract with outside vendors or provide these tutoring services themselves. At present the system is designed so that districts can keep the motivated students with supportive families who initially apply for services, leaving the less motivated students to be served by outside providers.

Where, in all of this, is there a tough mandate? Admittedly, schools are to be "reconstituted" by their districts if they fail five years in a row. Will this mandate have a bite? Though it's too soon to tell, the reconstitution concept remains ill defined, leaving plenty of wiggle room for local school officials—the very same people who let these schools "fail" in the first place.

So is NCLB too weak to succeed? Not as long as test results continue to be reported to the public. Because of NCLB, parents and taxpayers are being told, more clearly than ever, how much students are learning at school.

This, it seems, is the excruciating mandate that many school officials and union leaders detest most. The feds are making them squirm under a bright light of public information about the schools' performance. What's so bad about that?

-PAUL E. PETERSON

MISSION STATEMENT In the stormy seas of school reform, this journal will steer a steady course, presenting the facts as best they can be determined, giving voice (without fear or favor) to worthy research, sound ideas, and responsible arguments. Bold change is needed in American K-12 education, but *Education Next* partakes of no program, campaign, or ideology. It goes where the evidence points.

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Costly estimates

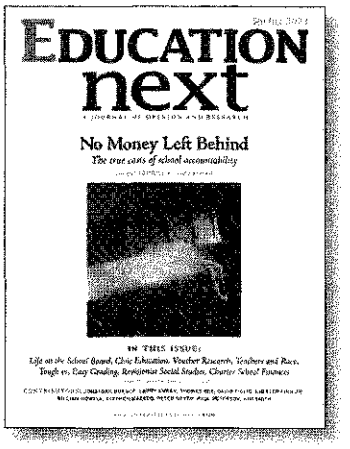
In the article "Exploring the Costs of Accountability" (*Feature*, Spring 2004), James Peyser and Robert Costrell discuss the critical question in K–12 education finance today: How much will it cost for a school with a particular set of student needs to meet a state's expectations for performance?

Over the past several years our firm has estimated the cost of an "adequate" education in several states; most of these analyses were completed before the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act became operational. We are currently helping a state estimate the costs that can be attributed directly to NCLB.

The authors conclude that NCLB's critics "greatly exaggerate the shortfall of federal resources." To make that conclusion, however, requires a full accounting of the costs likely to be incurred, including the expense of building accountability systems, undertaking school improvement, providing supplemental services, hiring highly qualified personnel, making schools safe, and managing information. The authors' suggestion that states could use a "triage" approach to focus resources on the most needy schools confuses what is likely to happen, based on the available resources, with what needs to happen in order to meet state and federal standards.

Where we disagree most with the authors is about how best to estimate the indirect costs of NCLB—the costs associated with meeting targets for adequate yearly progress. The authors reject two widely used approaches to making such estimates despite the acceptance of these strategies by state legislatures and courts.

The photographs accompanying the article "A Board's Eye View" in the Spring 2004 issue were taken by Patrick Harbron, www.patrickharbron.com. The editors regret the omission.



The dismissal of the "professional judgment" approach eliminates a rational way of thinking about a hypothetical situation when research and statistics have not addressed the issue with any definitive conclusions. The authors are more supportive of the "successful schools" approach because it is based on some evidence of relative performance. While they prefer to focus on academic growth rather than on absolute levels of achievement, they choose to consider only the aggregate improvement in test scores. Aggregate improvement is one useful piece of evidence in the absence of full value-added information, but it is subject to error when used in isolation.

Given that every approach has limitations, it makes sense to us to gather information based on as many approaches as data will support and use the results to ensure that school districts have adequate resources.

JOHN AUGENBLICK
ROBERT PALAICH
Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates, Inc.
Denver, Colorado

The new Head Start

Ron Haskins asks whether Democrats should go along with the Bush administration's new vision for the Head Start program ("Competing Visions," *Feature*, Winter 2004). I am one Democrat who will concede that the administration is on the right track in pushing Head Start to pay more attention to children's cognitive skills.

My own and other studies show that children from low-income families enter kindergarten a year to a year and a half, on average, behind middle-class children in their language and many other cognitive skills. This is a gigantic lag considering that they are only five to six years old. Moreover, children's early skills are the strongest predictor of their long-term achievement. Anything short of a serious effort to give disadvantaged children a better chance of succeeding in school is irresponsible.

As Haskins points out, the early childhood education community has resisted a focus on academic skills in Head Start, concerned that attention to academic skills will dilute efforts to promote positive social and emotional development and that the comprehensive health services that Head Start currently provides will be abandoned. The community is also concerned that the teaching strategies that will be implemented to improve academic skills will not be appropriate for young children.

These are legitimate concerns. Closing the achievement gap will require more than teaching young children basic pre-reading and math skills. Social skills and emotional adjustment are strong predictors of students' academic performance and their effective functioning as adults. Physical health and well-being also affect learning, and have value in their own right. But there is no reason why Head Start can't give more attention to cognitive development while still keeping its commitment to comprehensive services and other aspects of development.

Now to the issue of *how*. My own and others' research suggests that some strategies for teaching children acade-

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mic skills may do more harm than good. Middle-class children do not achieve their academic advantage by writing the letters of the alphabet and counting to ten over and over. Children learn best, and enjoy learning most, when they are actively involved in authentic activities—being read to, telling and discussing stories, identifying and sounding out the letters in their names, counting and grouping objects, measuring ingredients, and so on. The teacher's role is to structure activities, ask questions, guide children's explorations, and assess their skills and understanding to ensure that well-articulated learning goals are being achieved.

We don't need to *make* children ready to learn. They are born ready to learn, and most are quite eager learners. We can, however, easily squash that eagerness. I hope the Bush administration will provide the resources needed to prepare teachers to implement effective teaching practices and develop an accountability approach that will promote effective teaching rather than teaching that will turn children off from learning before they even start school.

DEBORAH STIPEK
Dean, Stanford University School of Education
Palo Alto, California

Inventing an ideology

Jonathan Burack argues that a "global education ideology" has "captivated" social studies experts in recent years, resulting in a curriculum that is "deeply suspicious" of both American institutions and our role in the world ("The Sun Sets on the West," *Feature*, Spring 2004).

Like many previous critics of social studies, Mr. Burack relies on a few quotes taken out of context to shock his readers into concern that an "antiwestern" bias has taken over the education of our youth. The "global education ideology" described by Burack is largely his own creation. Though there are a number of scholars in the field of social-studies education who focus on global studies or global education, they are an intellectually diverse lot and are far from unified on questions of curriculum content and ideology.

While Burack argues that global education's believers "exercise a strong degree of influence among textbook publishers," many of the problems he describes with the treatment of global diversity are a reflection of the textbook production and marketing process rather than the result of a conspiracy among educators.

Burack seems to suggest that we should deemphasize criticism of western hegemony in global affairs. He forgets the powerful role that western and U.S. militarism and economic clout have played in world affairs and in the domination and subjugation of many of the world's peoples and material resources over recent centuries. Historically, our schools have imparted what amounts to a white studies curriculum via the glorification of western leaders, institutions, and traditions. If Burack has his way, schools will regress to a 19th-century focus on traditional history and the concomitant aversion to asking deep questions.

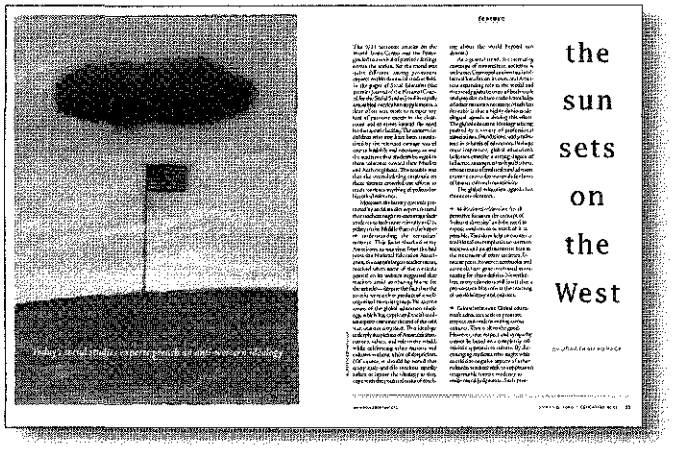
RONALD W. EVANS
San Diego State University
San Diego, California

Benefits of the C-minus

It was a pleasure to read "The Gentleman's A" (David N. Figlio and Maurice E. Lucas, *Research*, Spring 2004), in part because it accords with common sense. The teacher you remember from your youth is not the easy grader who let you get away with a weak performance; it is the tough one who gave you a challenge and was not easy to please. I know that researchers usually prefer "counterintuitive" results, but in matters like these it is often the case that science is better judged by common sense than common sense by science.

It would be interesting to learn the authors' view of the importance of sustaining students' self-esteem. Is it better for less able students to receive high or low grades? Do high grades encourage them to do better than they otherwise would do, or do such students do worse because they live in a fool's paradise, ignorant of their true capacities?

It would also be nice to know the characteristics of tough graders. Are their IQs higher or lower than those of easy graders? Are they more likely to be liberal or conservative? And what about sex, religion, and union affiliation? What do they think they are accom-



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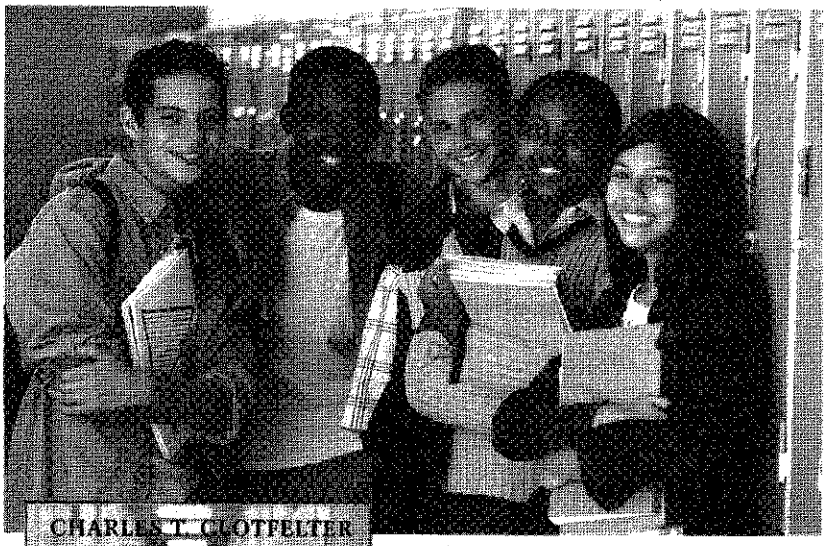

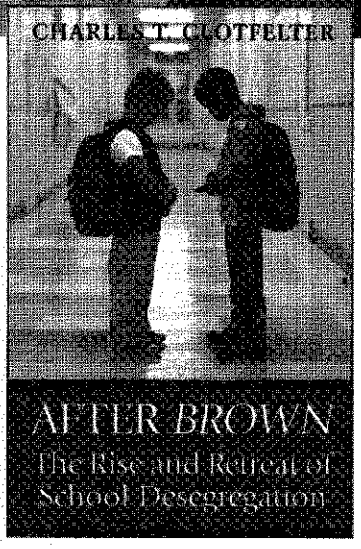

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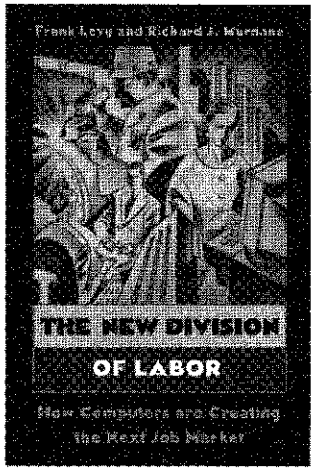

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Cambridge, Massachusetts

Why not choose teachers?

Paul E. Peterson and William G. Howell's article, "Voucher Research Controversy" (*Check the Facts*, Spring 2004), was informative regarding the academic debate over school choice. I am struck, however, by how the debate has focused on parental choice of *schools*.

Previous research has shown that teacher quality contributes more to student achievement than anything else a school does. So why not allow parents to choose their children's teachers as well?

Enabling teacher choice in a formal way could yield a number of benefits. For one thing, the prevailing method of compensating public school teachers—higher pay for additional years of experience and schooling—has not been shown to correlate consistently with improved test scores. By contrast, teacher choice would identify which teachers are most "in demand" among parents and therefore deserving of increased compensation. Those in the least demand could be replaced.

The practical obstacles to such a system are formidable, not the least of which is the teacher unions' contention that all teachers are equal and thus deserve equal pay. Nevertheless, as a vision for change, it deserves consideration. Imagine what the power of choice might do for public education if consumers were to scrutinize test scores as intensely in choosing teachers as they do when buying real estate.

BEN RARICK
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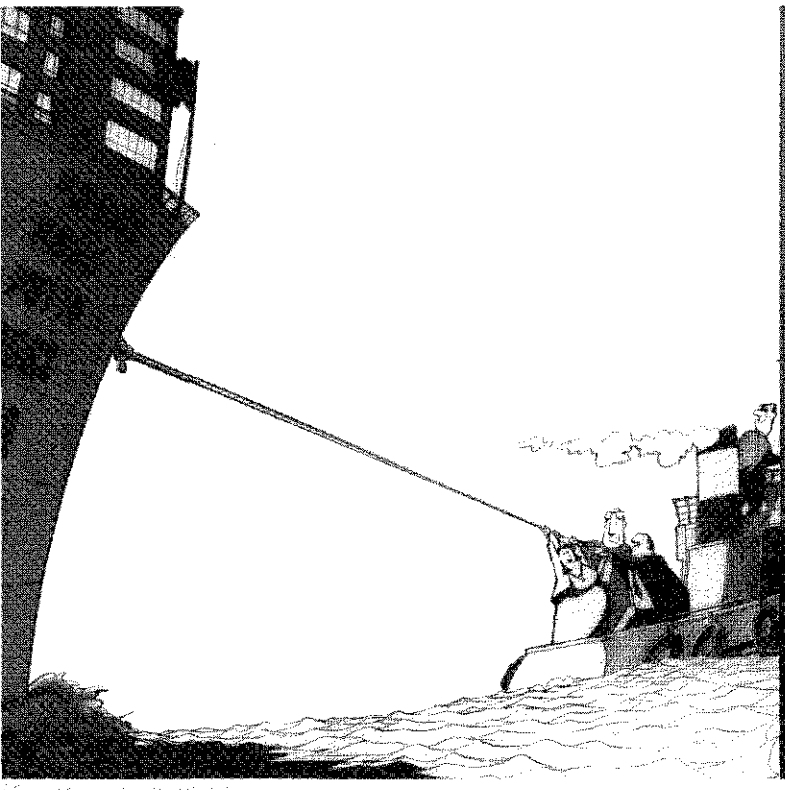
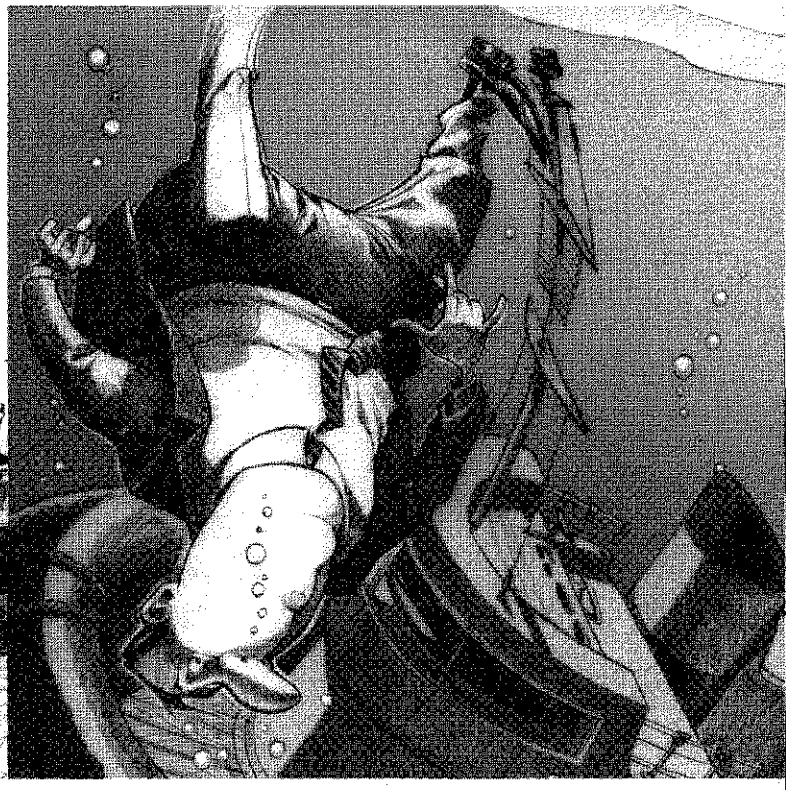


Sarah Glover on the necessity of school boards
PAGE 10



Chester E. Finn Jr. and Lisa Graham Keegan on the end of school boards PAGE 14

The Future *of* School Boards

Agents of reform or defenders of the status quo?

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRUCE MACPHERSON

Across the nation, urban officials are becoming increasingly disillusioned with the performance of elected school boards. The examples of mayors Richard Daley in Chicago and Michael Bloomberg in New York City—both of whom sought and won direct control over their city's school systems—have inspired other mayors, such as Anthony Williams in Washington, D.C., to press for the power to appoint the school board's members or dissolve the board altogether.

The typical complaints lodged against elected school boards are that no one person is in charge of the schools and that board members are often concerned more with advancing their own political careers than tending to the students' educational needs. The resulting turf battles and grandstanding can create chaos instead of focused leadership.

School boards in some cities, notably in San Diego and Houston, have coalesced around a vision for reform and put that vision into action. Can they become the norm rather than the exception? And if not, are there alternatives that can keep the public involved in school governance while still encouraging high performance?

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Steering *a true course*

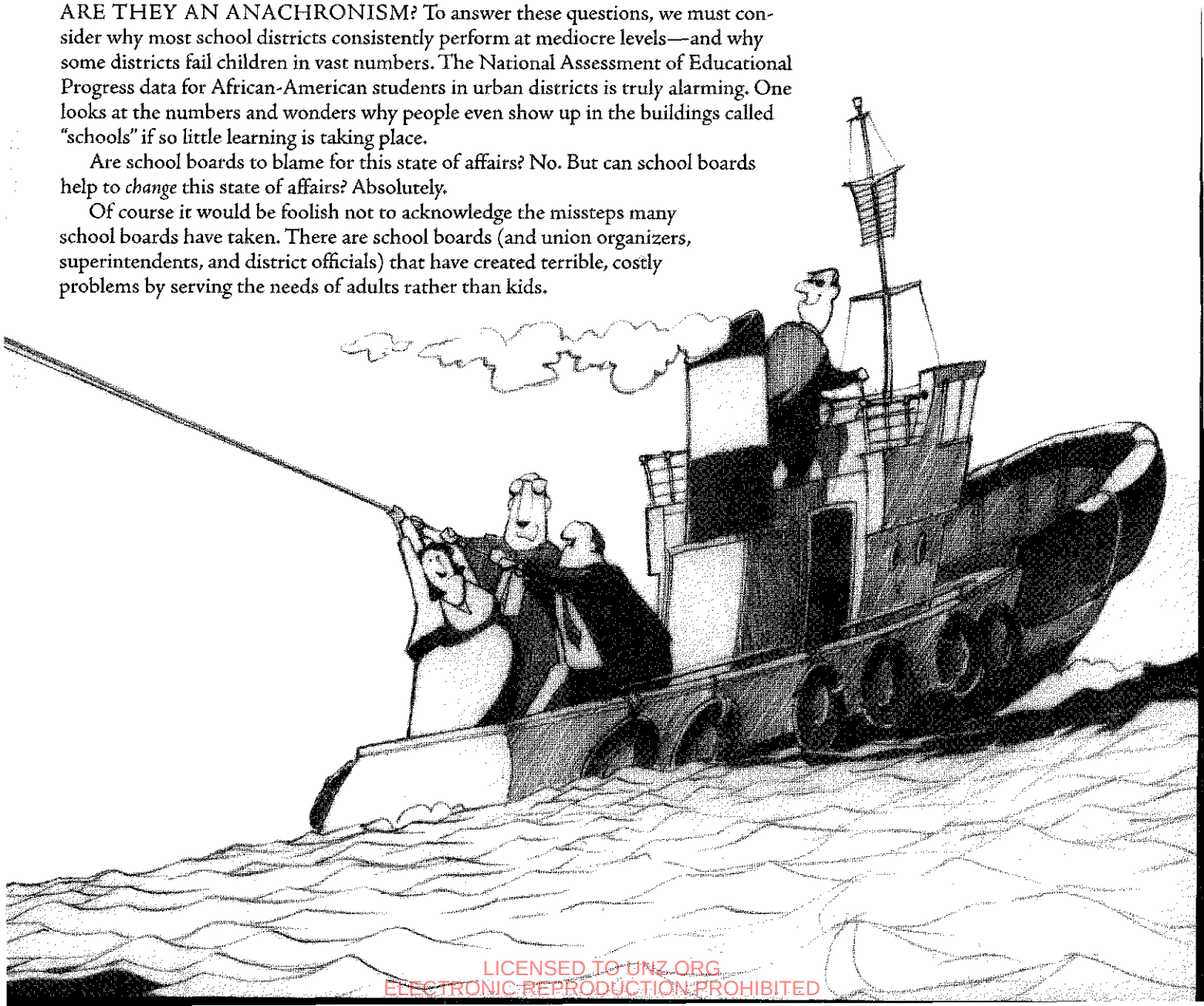
School boards are coming under increasing attack, yet they are needed now more than ever. Who else will set the agenda for reform?

by SARAH C. GLOVER

HAVE SCHOOL BOARDS OUTLIVED THEIR USEFULNESS? ARE THEY AN ANACHRONISM? To answer these questions, we must consider why most school districts consistently perform at mediocre levels—and why some districts fail children in vast numbers. The National Assessment of Educational Progress data for African-American students in urban districts is truly alarming. One looks at the numbers and wonders why people even show up in the buildings called "schools" if so little learning is taking place.

Are school boards to blame for this state of affairs? No. But can school boards help to *change* this state of affairs? Absolutely.

Of course it would be foolish not to acknowledge the missteps many school boards have taken. There are school boards (and union organizers, superintendents, and district officials) that have created terrible, costly problems by serving the needs of adults rather than kids.



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For instance, until 2001, the school board in Duval County, Florida, contracted with more than one hundred private bus companies to provide students with transportation—about $36 million worth of services—without soliciting competing bids. Today the school district has four competitively bid contracts, a consolidation that has resulted in substantial direct and indirect cost savings.

But if school boards have outlived their usefulness as evidenced by district performance, wouldn't we also have to say that superintendents, the district model, and teacher and administrator preparation programs have all outlived their usefulness as well? Well, they might have. Which means there needs to be a dramatic redesign of schools and school systems to achieve different results. But that leads us right back to school boards—or some other form of local governance.

Some argue that school districts are the chief hindrance to such a "dramatic redesign." They may be. But waving a wand to make districts and school boards disappear will not solve this problem. More than ten years of experience with charter schools has demonstrated that, in the absence of a traditional school district, it is still necessary to have some form of local oversight. There are poor performers and unscrupulous players to monitor. This cannot happen from the state level; states don't have the capacity or the reach. Some form of local governance must exist—not only because of the sheer number of schools, but because the quality of decisionmaking tends to disintegrate as it moves farther from the target. Moreover, some core group in the community has to have a fire in its belly for better results. It has to be the school board.

Leadership for Reform

Poll after poll finds people dissatisfied with public education as a whole, but they consistently give their local schools high marks. This should tell us that parents are not going to push for wholesale improvement. They don't appear to see a need for it.

Perhaps the superintendent and district staff could lead the charge? Don't hold your breath. It is unrealistic to expect people within the system to generate a commitment to significant change and follow through when the upheaval affects employees' job security, pay, and recognition. Expecting significant change to develop from within a bureaucracy is like expecting marshmallow fluff to take on the properties of titanium. Besides, superintendents are mobile professionals—they move from city to city and are rarely committed to a long-term vision for a community.

How about city government? Some mayors have inserted themselves in this role and been effective. But mayors have plenty to do without making sure the school district is on track. What happens when the mayor's attention is absorbed by a natural disaster? City budget deficit? Reelection campaign? Of course, members of elected school boards have their own reelection campaigns to worry about—but this is in no way comparable to a mayor's campaign. School board elections are focused on . . . schools. They are also dramatically different in scale. The sitting mayor in Houston spent over $8 million on his campaign; candidates for the Houston school board spend about $50,000. And in a large district just outside of Houston, winning school board candidates often spend less than $1,000.

What if the next mayor does not maintain the focus on education? School districts are much larger (in employees, budgets, facilities) than traditional city agencies like fire, police, and sanitation. School districts are also just plain harder to manage because they are so intensely human. The resources are teachers, the raw materials are children, and the product is learning. This is a world different from getting sewage clean. Mayoral control of school districts is not likely to be stable or focused over time.

How about the business community? In 15 case studies of cities across the nation, the Center for Reform of School Systems has found that business involvement is uneven and crisis-driven. Perhaps more troubling, as businesses consolidate and there are fewer corporate headquarters, there are fewer business leaders who train their focus on a specific city. An education leader in Charlotte, North Carolina, said: "The bank CEOs used to be like our benevolent dictators—and they deeply cared about what happened in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools. But now, the world is their playground. They are as worried about Tokyo as they are about Charlotte."

Religious leaders? They are obviously important contributors, but not organized or funded for systematic oversight of schools and school systems.

That leaves school boards, groups of citizens who are specifically concerned with driving school reform. It's a fair question to ask whether local school boards have the will or the capacity to take on the responsibility of leading change. Some argue that school boards are the vanguard of the status quo, investing their time defending the "one best system" that perennially delivers dismal results.

But that is by no means universal. In Houston, Seattle, Sacramento, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, and Dayton, school boards have been the *primary* actors in reform. Likewise, the school boards in Aldine, Texas, and Long Beach, California, have been strong partners in maintaining a commitment to delivering better results. The Philadelphia School Reform Commission (the new name for the city's school board) saved a sinking ship. In St. Louis, the school board took on great personal and political risk to hire a private management firm skilled in the art of the turnaround.

In these cities, the school boards hired superintendents

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with the clear intention of promoting systemic change in the district. Some of these boards ensure that the superintendent's contract is tied to performance targets, providing salary bonuses for specific increases in student achievement over time.

The reforms in Philadelphia and St. Louis are too recent to assess, but all the other districts have logged student achievement gains, some of them substantial. The Washington, D.C.–based Education Trust recently recognized both Houston and Aldine with its prestigious "Dispelling the Myth" award for narrowing gaps in student achievement.

This need for outside pressure may be an argument for appointed boards. But, of the districts listed above, only Philadelphia has an appointed board. If the democratic process is yielding poorly qualified school board members, then we should all pay attention to recruiting and supporting talented people to run for school board. This is a leadership deficit that city governments, business leaders, and the faith community are well poised to address.

Local Accountability

The improvements observed in school districts during the past several years (largely confined to the elementary grades) can be traced to increased accountability and standards developed and imposed by the state. So, for much of the past 20 years, the state has been the outside source of pressure on school districts to improve. But these are "big box" improvements that can go only so far. By definition they cannot address needs that are idiosyncratic to a local geography or local economy.

For instance, some of the school boards named above implemented district accountability systems that are congruent with but go beyond the state accountability systems. How can the state of Texas—which serves four million students—create a standards and accountability system that perfectly meets the needs of students in Houston and far-off Amarillo? It can't. So in the Houston Independent School District, students take the Stanford achievement test. These scores are then used to rate schools in the district's accountability system, which was designed to augment the state's. These testing requirements are established in local board policy, not required by the state. The state can do some of the heavy lifting—and then local leaders need to augment to meet local needs.

Not many school boards are exercising this responsibility. A Center for Reform of School Systems survey found that less than 25 percent of the nation's 120 largest districts were implementing anything that wasn't purely reactive. Only 10 percent had actual teeth in their local accountability measures. The fact that school boards are not exercising leadership in this area means they need to get busy—not disappear.

Watching the Coffers

As long as public dollars flow to schools and districts, it is important that the use of those dollars is looked after. There must be oversight. In large states like Texas, California, and Florida, the state's reach is not long enough or skilled enough to get the job done. There is no way for a state education administrator in Sacramento to be in tune with what is happening in Chula Vista and the umpteen other districts this person would surely follow. The Chula Vista students would just be numbers for the state administrator, easily disappearing in columns of test results.

Some who suggest that school boards should disappear also argue that school districts should vanish. But what do a vast number of individual schools look like without local governance? A recipe for disaster. A high-level Texas Education Agency administrator told me that she spends more time on the handful of charter schools that request assistance from her office than on the more than 1,000 school districts she serves. One can quickly see how the state's being responsible for local governance is farcical.

Without proper oversight, opportunities for mismanagement and fraud will abound. Many states have horrid stories of unscrupulous charter school operators defrauding the state. We cannot be naïve about sending millions of public dollars into the hands of individual school operators or district managers.

Yes, school boards and school board members have themselves been involved in shady deals. There are too many stories of school board members influencing district contracts in ways that have benefited themselves, their friends, and their families. But how will the wrongs disappear if school boards vanish? They won't. We will just have a new list of things going wrong.

School boards—or some form of local governance—must exist. They should be held responsible for leading significant reform, holding their schools accountable for high student achievement, and ensuring that tax dollars are deployed efficiently.

For school boards to live up to this list of responsibilities, they must focus clearly on the core mission of the district: high performance of *kids*—not safe harbors for adults. City leaders must participate actively in recruiting talented and committed people to run for boards or to be appointed to boards. States should ensure that school board elections are held with other elections so that narrow interest groups don't gain such a toehold.

School boards must take responsibility for improving district performance. Indeed, they are the only group that can.

–Sarah C. Glover is the director of programs and operations at the Center for Reform of School Systems, a Houston-based group that promotes reform-minded school board leadership.

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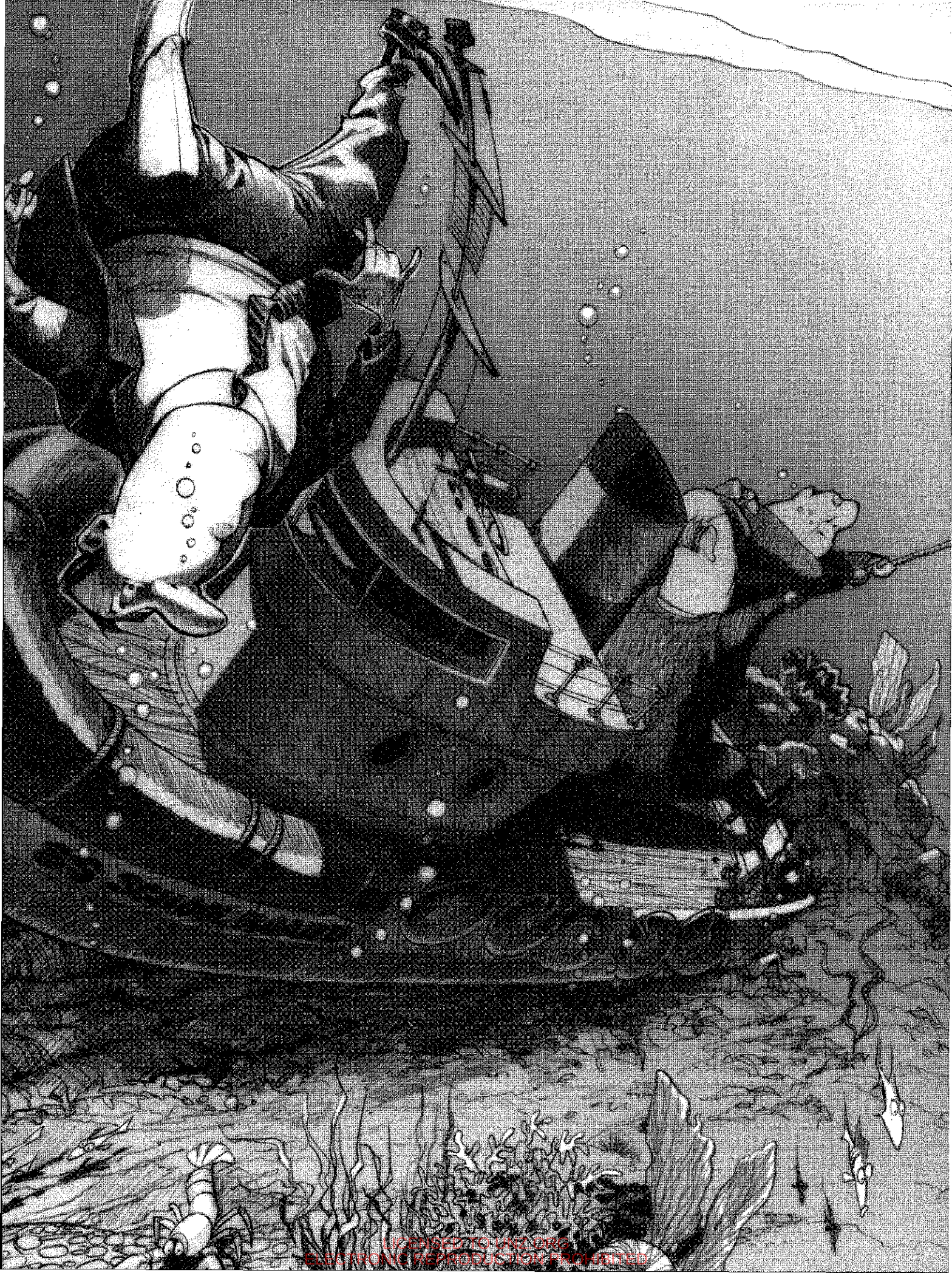

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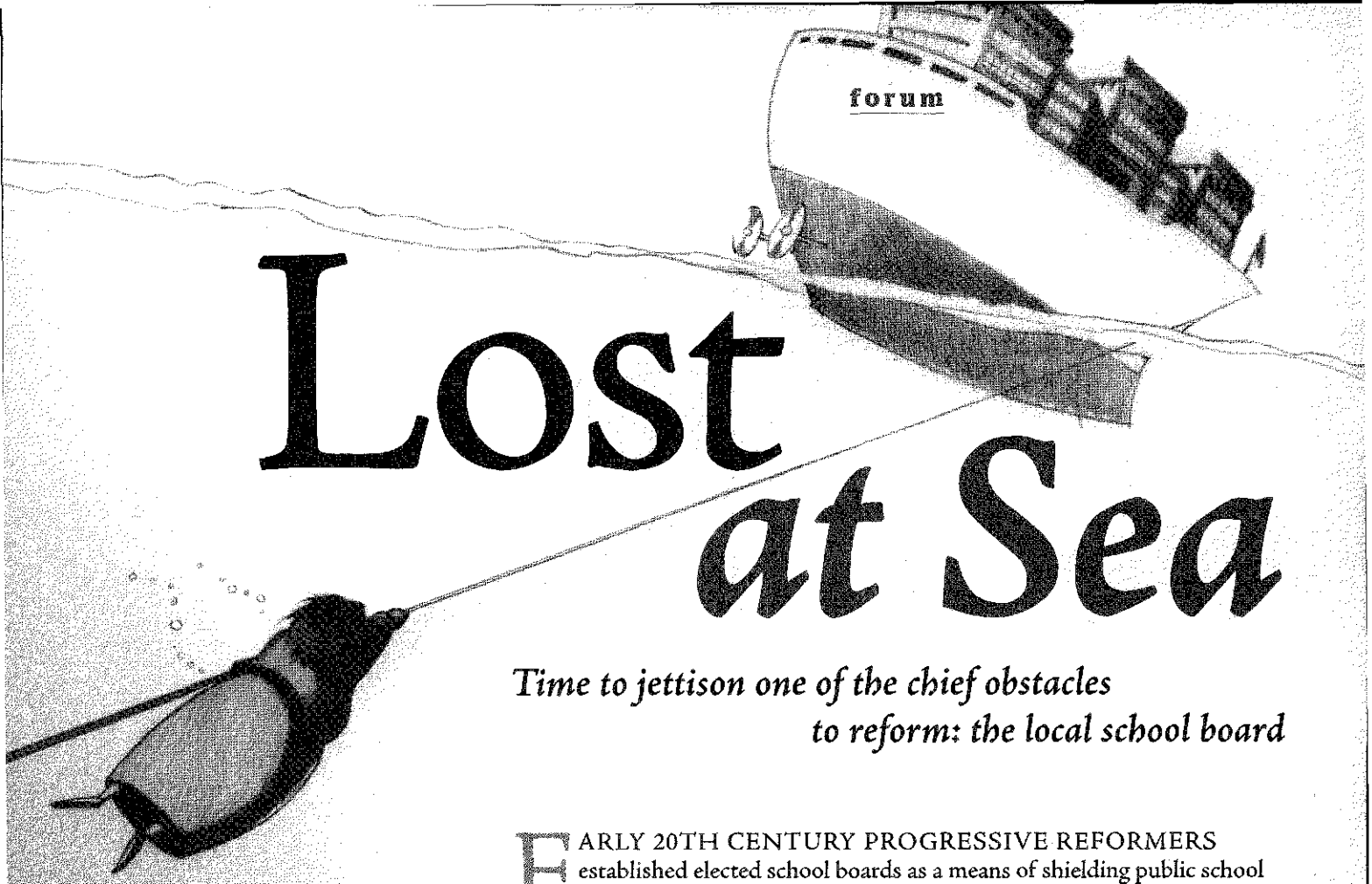

Lost at Sea

Time to jettison one of the chief obstacles to reform: the local school board

EARLY 20TH CENTURY PROGRESSIVE REFORMERS established elected school boards as a means of shielding public school systems from the politics and patronage of corrupt city governments. Citizens, rather than political dons or their favored appointees, would govern the community's schools with the community's interests at heart.

Today, however, elected school boards, especially in America's troubled cities, are just as apt to contribute to the school system's ills. They often resemble a dysfunctional family, composed of three unlovable types: 1) aspiring politicians for whom this is a rung on the ladder to higher office; 2) former employees of the school system with a score to settle; and 3) single-minded advocates of one dubious cause or another who yearn to use the public schools to impose their particular hang-up on all the kids in town.

These junior politicians often do more harm than good, representing the community's factions more than its interests. Progressives thought the elected school board would keep politics out of education. In fact, it has immersed our public schools in politics. One need only witness the behavior of the Chicago and New York City school boards before their recent mayoral takeovers—or the behavior of the Los Angeles and Dallas school boards today.

Cities across America are beginning to recognize that the traditional school board is no longer the embodiment of participatory democracy it was intended to be. The romantic notion that local school boards are elected by local citizens has been replaced with the reality that these elections are essentially rigged. They are held at odd times, when practically nobody votes except those with a special reason to do so. For example, in 2002, just 4 percent of registered voters in Dallas turned out to participate in July elections that replaced six school board members. And, of course, those motivated voters include a disproportionate number of the school system's own employees.

by CHESTER E. FINN JR. AND LISA GRAHAM KEEGAN

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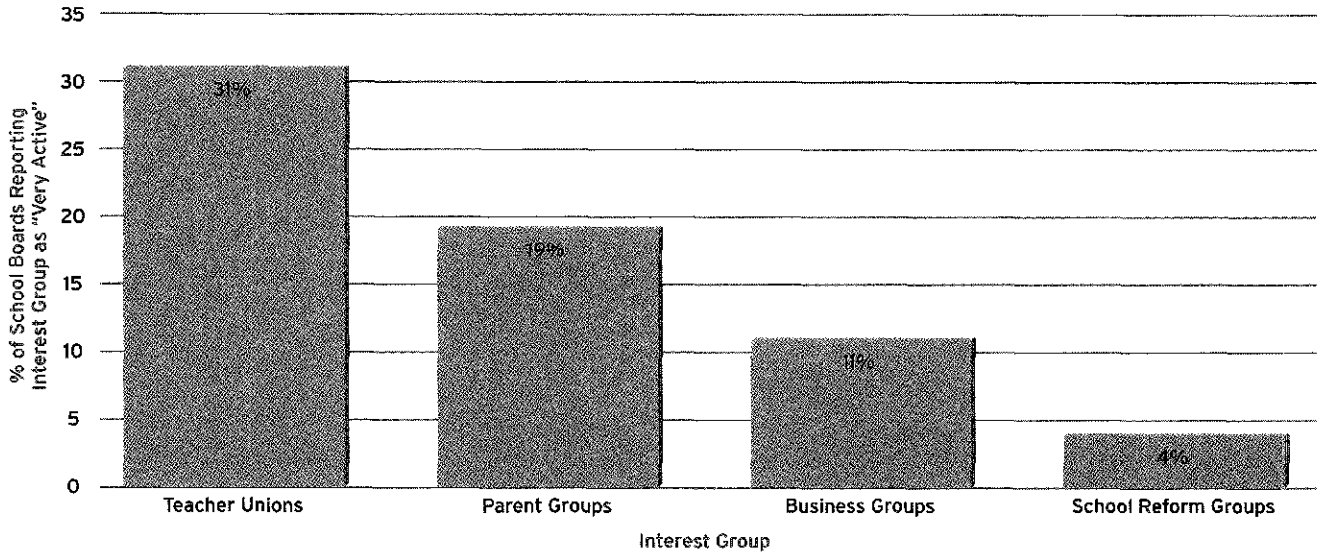
Governed by Community Interests? (Figure 1)

Just 19 percent of school boards report that groups representing parents are "very active" in school board elections; 31 percent say teacher unions are.



Note: 2001 survey of a nationally representative sample of 827 school districts.

SOURCE: Frederick M. Hess and David L. Leal, "School House Politics: Expenditures, Interests, and Competition in School Board Elections," in *School Boards Beset*, William G. Howell, ed., forthcoming.

The teacher unions now dominate many a school board election, or at least have the capacity to do so (see Figure 1). When the board is quiet and rocks no education boats, the union rests. But as we have seen in cities like Milwaukee and Los Angeles, when the board undertakes the kinds of reforms that the union doesn't favor, the union will mobilize to elect friendly candidates. Thus, in 2002, the Los Angeles union unseated a majority of the reform-minded board that had selected former Colorado governor Roy Romer to lead the city's troubled school system. Likewise, in 1995, a union-led coup in Milwaukee produced a majority on that city's school board that reform superintendent Howard Fuller realized he could not work with.

Is it any wonder, then, that cities like New York, Chicago, and Boston have torn down the Chinese wall that was supposed to isolate school districts from city governments and placed responsibility for the schools squarely in the hands of the mayor? In these cities, there is now a single, publicly accountable official in charge, rather than nine wannabe mayors immobilizing the school system with their petty squabbles, power grabs, and turf protecting. If citizens are unhappy with the schools, they can now vote the mayor out of office. This does not eliminate democratic control over the schools; it rechannels—and strengthens—it.

Perpetuating Inequity

Local school boards exist largely to oversee the spending of funds drawn from local property taxes. In this sense, they are supposed to be the community's accountability mechanism, ensuring that school officials use locally generated resources wisely and responsibly. However, several trends are rendering that role obsolete.

First, there is an increasing recognition that the funding system that school boards perpetuate results in unfair resource disparities between wealthy and poor school districts. It discourages the best teachers from entering the schools where they're needed most and further segregates families by income and race. The wave of lawsuits involving school finances that have been filed against the states has resulted in states (and, indirectly, Washington) taking ever-greater responsibility for funding local public schools. In the past 50 years, the share of school spending provided by states increased from 40 percent to 50 percent, while the share provided by localities decreased from 57 percent to 43 percent. This trend will only continue.

Second, the standards and accountability movement is rendering the performance of individual schools transparent to parents and communities. Under yesterday's system, school boards were needed to keep watch over the superintendent, assistant superintendents, and other district officials as they managed the school system. Now, however, parents can use the information gleaned from state accountability systems to assess the performance of an individual school or school system.

Third, the choice movement, including charter schools, magnet schools, vouchers, and outsourced school management, has shown us what it means to devolve authority from bureaucratic systems to individual schools and families. Power is flowing downward, to the principal, to the teaching team, and to parents themselves. Once every school is essentially a charter school, there will be no need for a centralized municipal-level body that makes decisions for an

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entire school system. Individual schools will respond to the needs of their families and employees while the state sets standards and monitors academic results.

School boards are supposed to provide top-down accountability. But these three trends—the steady centralization of funding, the imposition of statewide accountability systems, and the expansion of choice—are creating a system that favors bottom-up accountability and obviates the need for local boards.

Ultimately, the only way to guarantee that every child receives equal support will be for states to take responsibility for funding the schools, with help from the feds. A statewide taxation and funding system would provide a certain amount of tuition dollars to each child with the amounts varying according to individual needs. For example, disabled or severely disadvantaged children would receive more. Then the money follows the child, in a virtual "financial backpack," to the school of the family's choice. Once the state issues its annual report on schools' academic progress, safety, and teachers' qualifications, families can decide where to send their children and tuition dollars.

With this kind of information and consumer power, there is no need for a locally elected board to advocate for better curriculum or more money at the municipal level—though individual schools are apt to develop "governing boards," as today's charter schools have and as do public schools in England and some other countries.

School boards and their associations have emerged as doughty defenders of the status quo.

This would create not only a more equitable system, but also more effective schools. Nearly everyone who has reflected on how the education system should operate tomorrow has concluded that yesterday's locally funded, monopoly-controlled system is out of whack with the way Americans now live. The K–12 school system has not kept pace with our mobility patterns, our communications technology, and, foremost, the way we deliver everything else we value in life. Consumer choice has given America the world's largest and most dynamic economy. It will also elicit better performance from the nation's schools.

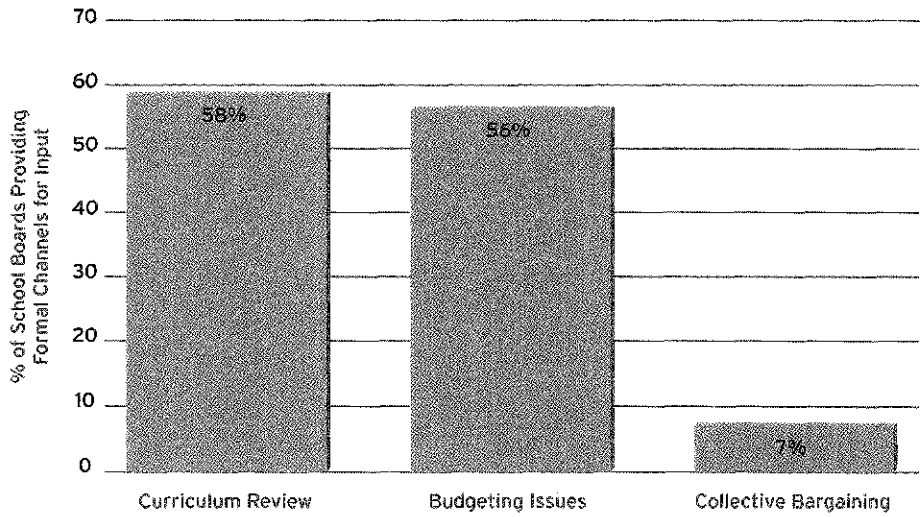
In the future, as choice becomes a standard feature of K–12 schooling, the education system will be composed not of centralized, government-run school districts, but of independently operated and competing education-delivery organizations. Most will be housed in traditional bricks and mortar, but some will be virtual, and a wide variety of "schools" will be found within each sector. Instead of being governed and operated by bureaucracies, these schools will answer to their customers and clients and to the expert educators who lead and teach in them.

Expect school boards to fight these changes every step of the way. After the teacher unions, the state school board association is usually the most influential conservative education force in the entire state. Here we use conservative in the classic sense of wanting to keep things exactly the way they've always been. At a time when a fundamental overhaul of American education is sorely needed, school boards and their associations have emerged as doughty defenders of the status quo. Fortunately, the changes being wrought by choice and accountability may soon render school boards the organizational dinosaurs of education in the 21st century.

–Chester E. Finn Jr. is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. Lisa Graham Keegan is the chief executive officer of Education Leaders Council, a member-based organization for reform-minded chief state school officers.

Behind Closed Doors (Figure 2)

Not only is collective bargaining essentially closed to the public, but less than 60 percent of school boards provide formal channels for community input on other key issues.



Note: 2001 survey of a nationally representative sample of 827 school districts.

SOURCE: Frederick M. Hess, "School Boards at the Dawn of the 21st Century," a report for the National School Boards Association.

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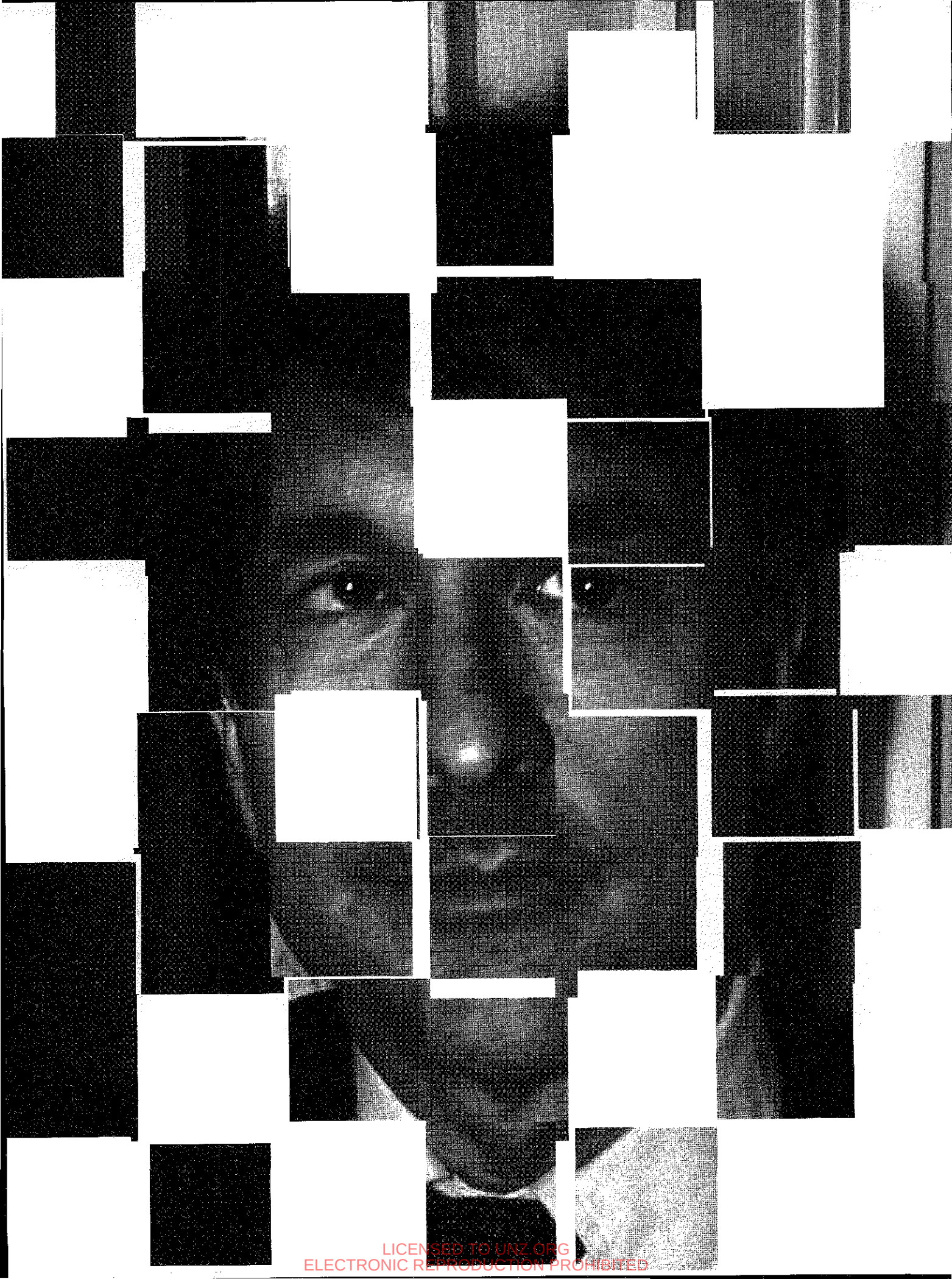

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by DANIEL T. WILLINGHAM

Reframing the Mind

Howard Gardner became a hero among educators simply by redefining talents as "intelligences"

Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences
(Basic Books, 1983)

Multiple Intelligences: The Theory into Practice
(Basic Books, 1993)

Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century
(Basic Books, 1999)

By Howard Gardner

Checked by Daniel T. Willingham

What would you think if your child came home from school and reported that the language-arts lesson of the day included using twigs and leaves to spell words? The typical parent might react with curiosity tinged with suspicion: Is working with twigs and leaves supposed to help my child learn to spell? Yes, according to Thomas Armstrong, author of *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom*, especially if your child is high in "naturalist" intelligence—one of eight distinct intelligences that Harvard University scholar Howard Gardner claims to have identified. However, if your child possesses a high degree of what Gardner terms "bodily-kinesthetic" intelligence, Armstrong suggests associating movement with spelling. For example, a teacher might try to connect sitting with consonants and standing with vowels.

Armstrong is far from alone in placing faith in Gardner's theory of "multiple intelligences." Gardner's ideas have been a significant force in education for the past 20 years—significant enough that they bear close study. How does the scientific community regard the theory of multiple intelligences, and what impact should the theory have on education?

Central Claims

Gardner first proposed his theory in 1983. Since then, it has undergone incremental but not fundamental change, including the addition of one intelligence (bringing the total to eight), the rejection of others, and consideration of the theory's applications. The theory rests on three core claims:

✦ Gardner says that most psychometricians, those who devise and interpret tests as a way of probing the nature of intelligence, conceive of intelligence as unitary. In *Intelligence Reframed*, Gardner's most recent restatement of his general theory, he writes, "In the ongoing debate among psychologists about this issue, the psychometric majority favors a general intelligence perspective."

This is not an accurate characterization of the position taken by most psychometricians. As will be shown, the vast majority regard intelligence not as a single unified entity, but as a multifaceted phenomenon with a hierarchical structure.

✦ *There are multiple, independent intelligences.* There are three parts to this claim, and it is important to appreciate all three. First, Gardner offers a new definition of *intelligence*, describing it as "a biopsychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture." Previous definitions were limited to cognition or thought; one was intelligent to the extent that one could solve problems and adapt effectively to one's environment using thinking skills. Gardner self-consciously broadens the definition to include effective use of the body and thinking skills relevant to the social world. He also extends the functionality of intelligence to include the crafting of useful products, not just the solving of problems. Second, Gardner claims to have identified some (but not all) of the several types of intelligence, which I describe below. Third, he claims that these multiple intelligences operate independently of one another.

✦ *The multiple intelligences theory has applications to education.* Gardner has been careful to say that he has proposed a scientific theory that should not be mistaken for a prescription for schooling. He makes clear that the educational implications of children's possessing multiple intelligences can and should be drawn, but he believes that many possible curricula and methods could be consistent with the theory. The sole general implication he supports is that children's minds are different, and an education system should take account of those differences, a point

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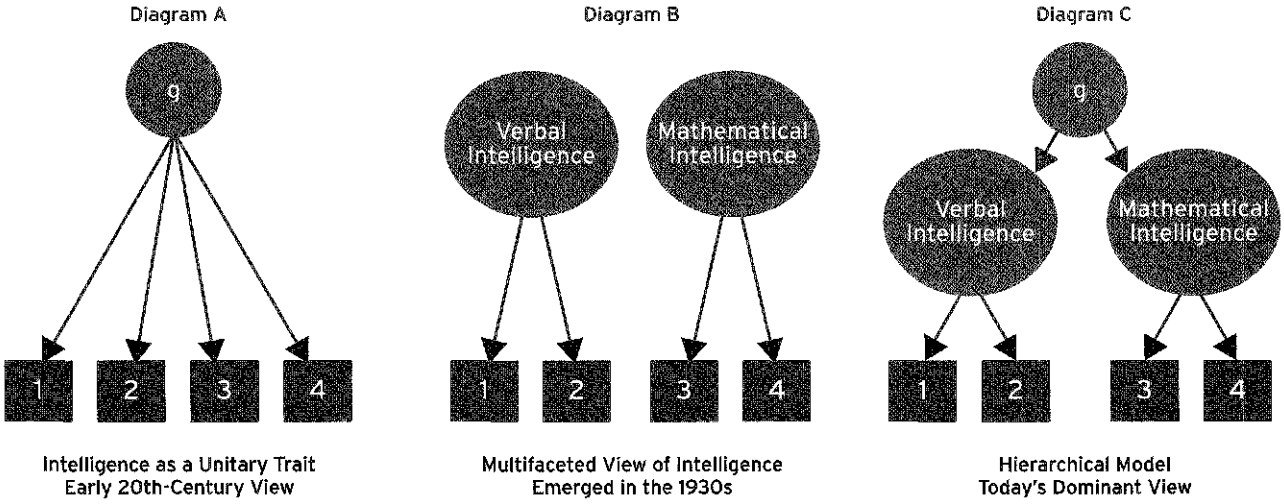
Multiple Views of Intelligence (Figure 1)

Gardner is incorrect in claiming that psychometricians believe intelligence is a unitary trait. Most psychometricians now favor a hierarchical view of intelligence.



Notes:
- "g" stands for general, a single factor underlying all intelligent behavior
- Numbered boxes represent performance on tests of different intellectual abilities

developed in diverse ways by his many followers.

One Intelligence or Many?

Let's evaluate each of Gardner's claims in turn, beginning with how psychometricians view intelligence. In the early 20th century, many psychometricians did in fact think of intelligence as a unitary trait, just as Gardner now claims. The thinking at that time was articulated by Charles Spearman, who suggested that a single factor (he called it *g*, for *general*) underlay all intelligent behavior. If you had a lot of *g*, you were smart; if you didn't, you weren't. However, by the 1930s some researchers (notably Louis L. Thurstone) were already arguing for a multifaceted view of intelligence. One might be intelligent in the use of words, for example, but unintelligent mathematically. From the 1950s on, many psychometricians proposed hierarchical models, which may be thought of as a mixture of the single-factor and multiple-factor models. Except for a few holdouts, most psychologists now favor the hierarchical model.

How can one use data from tests of cognitive ability to evaluate the number of intelligences? A straightforward approach entails administering a number of separate tests thought to rely on different hypothesized intelligences. Suppose tests 1 and 2 are different tests of verbal ability (for example, vocabulary and spelling), and tests 3 and 4 are different tests of mathematical ability. If there is one intelligence, *g*, then *g* should support performance on all four tests, as shown in diagram A of Figure 1 (this page). A high score on test 1 would indicate that the test-taker is high in *g*, and he or she should perform well on all of the other tests.

Suppose, however, that there are two intelligences—one verbal and one mathematical, as shown in diagram B of Figure 1. In that case, a high score on test 1 would predict a high score on test 2, but would tell us nothing about the individual's performance on the math tests, 3 and 4. Performance on those tests would depend on mathematical intelligence, which is separate and independent of verbal intelligence.

The data support neither of these views. To continue with our hypothetical example, the data show that all of the test scores, 1 through 4, are somewhat related to one another, which is consistent with the existence of *g*. But scores from tests of math ability are more related to one another than they are to verbal scores; the same goes for verbal scores. A hierarchical model, shown in diagram C of Figure 1, fits this pattern. In this model, *g* influences both mathematical and verbal cognitive processes, so performance on math and verbal tests will be somewhat related. But mathematical competence is supported not just by *g*, but by the efficacy of a mathematical intelligence that is separate and independent of a verbal intelligence. That's why math scores are more related to each other than they are to verbal scores. It also explains how it is possible for someone to be quite good in math, but just mediocre verbally. This logic applies not only to the restricted example used here (math and verbal) but also to a broad spectrum of tests of intellectual ability.

The hierarchical view of intelligence received a strong boost from a landmark review of the published data collected over the course of 60 years from some 130,000 people around the world. That massive review, performed by the late University of North Carolina scholar John Carroll, concluded that the hierarchical view best fits the data. Researchers still debate the exact organization of the hierarchy, but there is a general consensus around the

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hierarchical view of intelligence. Thus Gardner's first claim—that most psychometricians believe that intelligence is unitary—is inaccurate.

What Are the Intelligences?

Gardner's second claim is that individuals possess at least eight independent types of intelligence. The following list includes a definition of each along with examples Gardner has provided of professions that draw heavily on that particular intelligence.

- *Linguistic:* facility with verbal materials (writer, attorney).
- *Logico-mathematical:* the ability to use logical methods and to solve mathematical problems (mathematician, scientist).
- *Spatial:* the ability to use and manipulate space (sculptor, architect).
- *Musical:* the ability to create, perform, and appreciate music (performer, composer).
- *Bodily-kinesthetic:* the ability to use one's body (athlete, dancer).
- *Interpersonal:* the ability to understand others' needs, intentions, and motivations (salesperson, politician).
- *Intrapersonal:* the ability to understand one's own motivations and emotions (novelist, therapist with self-insight).
- *Naturalist:* the ability to recognize, identify, and classify flora and fauna or other classes of objects (naturalist, cook).

Gardner claims that everyone has all eight intelligences to some degree, but each individual has his or her own pattern of stronger and weaker intelligences. Gardner also argues that most tasks require more than one intelligence working together. For example, the conductor of a symphony obviously uses musical intelligence, but also must use interpersonal intelligence as a group leader and bodily-kinesthetic intelligence to move in a way that is informative to the orchestra. The claim of separate and independent intelligences is, of course, central to Gardner's theory. How do we know that these intelligences are independent?

Gardner broadens the definition of intelligence to include effective use of the body and thinking skills relevant to the social world.

It is important to bear in mind that the hierarchical model described in the previous section is not a theory, but a *pattern of data*. It is a description of how test scores are correlated. A theory of intelligence must be consistent with these data; the pattern of data is not itself a theory. For example, the data do not tell us what *g* is or how it works. The data tell us only that there is *some* factor that contributes to many intellectual tasks, and if your theory does not include such a factor, it is inconsistent with existing data. Gardner's theory has that problem.

Setting *g* aside, the claim of independence among the eight intelligences is also a problem. Data collected over the past 100 years consistently show that performances on intellectual tasks are correlated. Even if Gardner's theory did not include some general factor, it should at least provide a way to account for this correlation. The theory did not, and it was widely criticized for this failure. In some later writings, Gardner has said that he questions the explanatory power of *g*, not whether it exists—in other words, he doubts whether *g* makes much of a contribution to abilities Gardner deems important. He has also deemphasized the importance in his theory of whether the intelligences are truly independent.

Let's allow, then, that the intelligences Gardner has identified are not independent, but that there are a number of distinguishable (but correlated) intellectual capabilities in addition to *g*. Has Gardner done a good job of cataloguing them? It is instructive to examine the criteria by which Gardner determines whether an ability is an intelligence. The criteria are shown in the table on page 22.

Gardner's eight criteria appear to be quite rigorous: the psychometric criterion described in the previous section and seven others that span different domains of investigation. But Gardner weakens them by demanding that only a majority be satisfied, and some are rather easy to satisfy. The psychometric criterion is the most rigorous of the eight, but Gardner has largely ignored it. The remaining criteria are so weak that they cannot restrain a researcher with a zest for discovering new intelligences.

For instance, a *humor intelligence* and a *memory intelligence* certainly meet a majority of the criteria. Humor and memory can be used to solve problems and create valued products in many cultures and so meet Gardner's definition of *intelligence*. Both can be isolated by brain damage, each has a distinct developmental history, and there is evidence for the psychological separability of each. Some individuals show exceptional memory or sense of humor but no other remarkable mental abilities. The evolutionary plausibility of each intelligence is easy to defend as well. Humor would certainly

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The Gardner Criteria

Gardner's criteria for defining an intelligence are less rigorous than they appear. Gardner requires that only a majority be satisfied and some of the criteria are easy to satisfy. The psychometric criterion is the most rigorous of the eight, but Gardner has largely ignored it.

CRITERION	REASONING UNDERLYING CRITERION
Support from psychometric findings	Performance on tasks tapping the same intelligence should be more correlated than performance on tasks tapping different intelligences.
Support from experimental psychological tasks	It should be easier to carry out two tasks simultaneously if they rely on different intelligences than if they rely on the same one.
Potential isolation by brain damage	Intelligences that are separate cognitively are separate in the brain.
Evolutionary plausibility	Intelligences evolve if they are adaptive.
A core set of operations	Operations that enable the intelligence should be distinct from operations supporting other intelligences.
Susceptibility to encoding in a symbol system	Symbol systems exist to code what the mind is most sensitive to—the stuff of intelligences.
A distinct developmental history	Each intelligence goes through a definable set of stages as it develops toward an end-state of expertise.
The existence of exceptional individuals (e.g., idiot savants, prodigies)	One intelligence can be exceptionally well developed while others are in the normal or subnormal range.

be adaptive in a social species such as ours, and the adaptive nature of memory should be self-evident.

By these criteria I am also prepared to defend an *olfactory intelligence* and a *spelling intelligence* and to subdivide Gardner's spatial intelligence into *near-space intelligence* and *far-space intelligence*, thus bringing the total number of intelligences to 13. (Gardner, for reasons that are not clear to me, excludes sensory systems as potential intelligences, but not action systems such as bodily-kinesthetic.)

The issue of criteria by which new intelligences are posited is crucial, and it is in the selection of criteria that Gardner has made a fundamental mistake. Gardner's criteria make sense if one assumes extreme modularity in the mind, meaning that the mind is a confederation of largely independent, self-sufficient processes. Gardner argues that neuroscience bears out this assumption, but that is an oversimplification.

For example, suppose that mathematical and spatial intelligence have the structure depicted in Figure 2, where each letter represents a cognitive process. Mathematical reasoning requires the cognitive processes A through E. Spatial reasoning requires the processes B through F. Are math and spatial reasoning separate?

Most people would agree that they are not identical, but they are largely overlapping and don't merit being called separate. By Gardner's criteria, however, they likely would be. If we assume that each process (A through F) is localized in a different part of the brain, then if the part of the brain supporting process A were damaged, math ability would be compromised, but spatial ability would not, so the brain criterion would be met. If process A or process F had a different developmental progression than the others, the developmental criterion would be met. If A and F differ in their need for attentional resources, the experimental psychological criterion would be met. The criteria that Gardner mentions can be useful, but they do not signal *necessarily* separate systems. In fact, the one criterion that Gardner has routinely ignored—the psychometric—is the one best suited to the question posed: Are cognitive processes underlying a putative intelligence independent of other cognitive processes?

Gardner's second claim—that he has described multiple, independent varieties of intelligence—is not true. Intellectual abilities are correlated, not independent. Distinguishable abilities do exist, but Gardner's description of them is not well supported.

Should Theory Become Practice?

For the educator this debate may be, as Shakespeare wrote, sound and fury, signifying nothing. What matters is whether and how the theory inspires changes in teaching methods or curriculum. The extent to which multiple intelligence ideas are applied is difficult to determine because few hard data exist to describe what teachers actually do in the classroom. Even statements of schools' missions are of limited usefulness, although dozens of schools claim to center their curriculum on the theory. An administrator might insert multiple intelligences language in an effort to seem progressive. Or an administrator's enthusiasm may be sincere, but if the teachers are not supportive, the classroom impact will be minimal.

We are left with indirect measures. Textbooks for teachers in training generally offer extensive coverage of the theory, with little or no criticism. Furthermore, the ready availability of multiple intelligences classroom materials

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(books, lesson plans, and activities) leaves the impression that there is a market for such materials. The applications they suggest generally fall into two broad categories: curricular expansion and pedagogical stratagem.

Curriculum expansion suggests that schools should appeal to all of the intelligences. Some educators have called for a more inclusive approach that does not glorify any one of the intelligences at the expense of the others. The theory has also been viewed as providing a pedagogical stratagem—namely, to teach content by tapping all of the intelligences. For example, to help students learn punctuation, a teacher might have them form punctuation marks with their bodies (bodily-kinesthetic intelligence), assign an animal sound to each punctuation mark (naturalist intelligence), and sort sentences according to the required punctuation (logical-mathematical intelligence). The motive may be that students will most enjoy or appreciate the material when it is embedded in an intelligence that is their strength. In this sense, intelligences may be translatable. The student who is linguistically weak but musically strong may improve his spelling through a musical presentation.

Gardner has criticized both ideas. Regarding curriculum, Gardner argues that the goals of education should be set independently of the multiple intelligences theory, and the theory should be used to help reach those goals. In other words, he does not believe that status as an "intelligence" necessarily means that that intelligence should be schooled. This objection is doubly true if you doubt that Gardner has categorized the intelligences correctly.

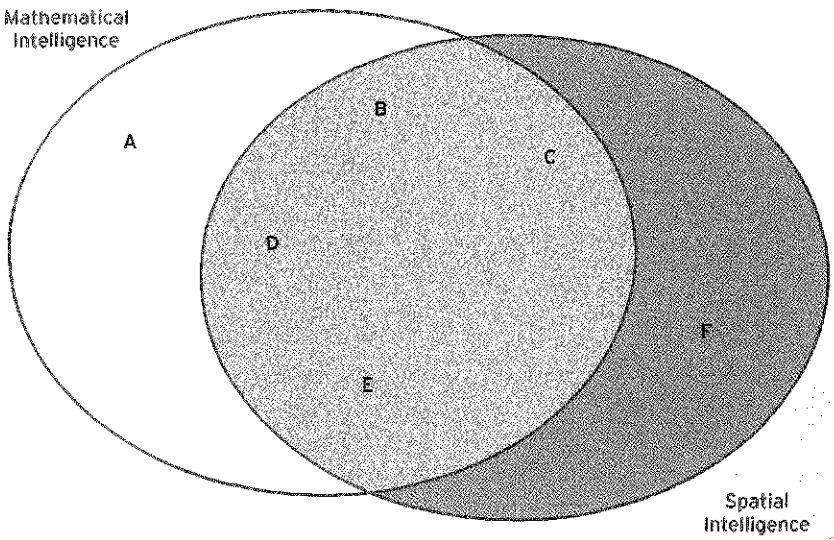
On the subject of pedagogy, Gardner sees no benefit in attempting to teach all subjects using all of the intelligences. He also expresses concern that some educators have a shallow understanding of what it takes to really engage an intelligence. Gardner writes, "It may well be easier to remember a list if one sings it (or dances to it). However, these uses of the 'materials' of an intelligence are essentially trivial. What is not trivial is the capacity to think musically." It is therefore surprising that Gardner wrote the preface for Thomas Armstrong's book, *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom*, which includes many such trivial ideas, such as singing spellings and spelling with leaves and twigs, as mentioned earlier. In the preface Gardner says that Armstrong provides "a reliable and readable account of my work." The inconsistency in Gardner's views is difficult to understand, but I believe he is right in calling some applications trivial.

Gardner also writes that intelligences are not fungible; the individual low in logico-mathematical intelligence but high in musical intelligence cannot somehow substitute the latter for the former and understand math through music. An alternative presentation may serve as a helpful metaphor, but the musically minded student must eventually use the appropriate representation to understand math. Gardner is on solid ground here. There is no evidence that subject-matter substitution is possible.

Gardner offers his own ideas of how multiple intelligences theory might be applied to education. Teachers should introduce a topic with different *entry points*, each of which taps primarily one intelligence. For example, the narrational entry point uses a story (and taps linguistic intelligence), whereas the logical entry point encourages the use of deductive logic in first thinking about a topic. Entry points are designed to intrigue the student via a presentation in an intelligence that is a particular strength for him or her. Gardner also believes that a thorough understanding of a topic is achieved only through multiple representations

Separate Intelligences? (Figure 2)

Gardner defines mathematical and spatial abilities as separate "intelligences" even if they share several cognitive processes.



The letters A through F represent cognitive processes

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using different intelligences. Hence significant time must be invested to approach a topic from many different perspectives, and topics should be important enough to merit close study.

How effective are Gardner's suggested applications? Again, hard data are scarce. The most comprehensive study was a three-year examination of 41 schools that claim to use multiple intelligences. It was conducted by Mindy Kornhaber, a long-time Gardner collaborator. The results, unfortunately, are difficult to interpret. They reported that standardized test scores increased in 78 percent of the schools, but they failed to indicate whether the increase in each school was statistically significant. If not, then we would expect scores to increase in half the schools by chance. Moreover, there was no control group, and thus no basis for comparison with other schools in their districts. Furthermore, there is no way of knowing to what extent changes in the school are due to the implementation of ideas of multiple intelligences rather than, for example, the energizing thrill of adopting a new schoolwide program, new statewide standards, or some other unknown factor.

What is perhaps most surprising about Gardner's view of education is that it is not more surprising. Many experienced educators probably suspected that different materials (songs, stories) engage different students and that sustained study using different materials engenders deep knowledge.

Multiple Talents

One may wonder how educators got so confused by Gardner's theory. Why do they believe that intelligences are interchangeable or that all intelligences should be taught? The answer is traceable to the same thing that made the theory so successful: the naming of various abilities as *intelligences*.

Textbooks for teachers in training offer extensive coverage of the multiple intelligences theory, with little or no criticism.

Why, indeed, are we referring to musical, athletic, and interpersonal skills as *intelligences*? Gardner was certainly not the first psychologist to point out that humans have these abilities. Great intelligence researchers—Cyril Burt, Raymond Cattell, Louis Thurstone—discussed many human abilities, including aesthetic, athletic, musical, and so on. The difference was that they called them talents or abilities, whereas Gardner has renamed them intelligences. Gardner has pointed out on several occasions that the success of his book turned, in part, on this new label: "I am quite confident that if I had written a book called 'Seven Talents' it would not have received the attention that *Frames of Mind* received." Educators who embraced the theory might well have been indifferent to a theory outlining different talents—who didn't know that some kids are good musicians, some are good athletes, and they may not be the same kids?

Gardner protests that there is no reason to differentiate—he would say aggrandize—linguistic and logico-mathematical intelligences by giving them a different label; either label will do, but they should be the same. He has written, "Call them all 'talents' if you wish; or call them all 'intelligences.'" By this Gardner means that the mind has many processing capabilities, of which those enabling linguistic, logical, and mathematical thought are just three examples. There is no compelling reason to "honor" them with a special name, in his view.

Gardner has ignored, however, the connotation of the term *intelligence*, which has led to confusion among his readers. The term *intelligence* has always connoted the kind of thinking skills that make one successful in school, perhaps because the first intelligence test was devised to predict likely success in school; if it was important in school, it was on the intelligence test. Readers made the natural assumption that Gardner's new intelligences had roughly the same meaning and so drew the conclusion that if humans have a type of intelligence, then schools should teach it.

It is also understandable that readers believed that some of the intelligences must be at least partially interchangeable. No one would think that the musically talented child would necessarily be good at math. But refer to the child as possessing "high musical intelligence," and it's a short step to the upbeat idea that the mathematics deficit can be circumvented by the intelligence in another area—after all, both are intelligences.

In the end, Gardner's theory is simply not all that helpful. For scientists, the theory of the mind is almost certainly incorrect. For educators, the daring applications forwarded by others in Gardner's name (and of which he apparently disapproves) are unlikely to help students. Gardner's applications are relatively uncontroversial, although hard data on their effects are lacking. The fact that the theory is an inaccurate description of the mind makes it likely that the more closely an application draws on the theory, the less likely the application is to be effective. All in all, educators would likely do well to turn their time and attention elsewhere.

–Daniel T. Willingham is a professor of psychology at the University of Virginia.

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Where the Rubber meets the Road

School districts confront the challenges of rolling out No Child Left Behind's school choice and supplemental services provisions

THE 2003–04 SCHOOL YEAR saw the first widespread implementation of the new federal education law's chief accountability measures. Districts with schools that had persistently failed to make "adequate yearly progress" in their test-score performance were required to offer the students in those schools options ranging from a seat in a higher-performing public school to free tutoring services. These measures were intended to stimulate competition, provide students with better alternatives, and punish underperforming schools in the hopes that they will improve.

As the following essays report, the process has been uneven, at best. A number of issues, some administrative, others owing to districts' intransigence, have kept the share of students exercising their right to transfer to another public school below 1 percent. Meanwhile, districts have had more success in providing eligible students with free tutoring. In part this reflects the fact that private tutoring firms, including marquee names like Kaplan, Sylvan, and the Princeton Review, are eager to carve slices from this new market. School districts, anxious about losing their federal dollars, are also designing their own tutoring programs.

Whether any of these sanctions will lead to better schools, it is too early to know. At the moment, many school officials seem to view them more as nuisances than levers for reform. And parents, for their part, remain poorly informed about their new options. That will need to change if the law's promise is ever to be fulfilled.

William G. Howell **provides an inside look at one school district's efforts** *page 26*

Michael Casserly **reports on big cities** *page 32*

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One Child at a time

An inside look at one city's efforts to offer families the opportunities promised by No Child Left Behind

by WILLIAM G. HOWELL

JAMES CARADONIO CAN BARELY CONTAIN HIS ODIUM for the federal government's latest efforts at education reform. The mere mention of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) sparks a tirade: "*Reductio ad absurdum*, you know. But this is what we're dealing with in terms of this insanity. Oh, it's numbers and it looks great. We've got numbers. Simple. And it all looks great and it's just killing, killing teachers and killing principals." He should know. As the superintendent of schools in Worcester, Massachusetts, and the only superintendent to serve on the inaugural statewide NCLB Implementation Team, Caradonio possesses intimate knowledge of, and influence over, the law's local successes and failures.

The impact of NCLB, which Caradonio terms the No Teacher Left Standing Act, was supposed to be felt most strongly in urban centers with large minority and disadvantaged populations—places just like Worcester. Instead, during its first two years, NCLB appeared to have little impact at all.

As of June 2003, 12 of Worcester's 50 public schools had been labeled "in need of improvement" for two consecutive years, and five schools for three years in a row. During the 2002–03 school year, under the new law's choice provisions, almost 4,700 students were entitled to transfer out of their failing schools and into one of the district's higher-performing schools. Roughly 1,800 students had the right to use Title I funds to obtain supplemental academic services from qualified public or private providers, another carrot the new law extends to children enrolled in underperforming schools.

As of December 2003, however, only one child in Worcester had switched schools. And just one more had taken advantage of the supplemental services provision to obtain tutoring from a provider outside of the public school system.

For the most part, local officials have taken the fact that so few parents have switched schools or demanded private supplemental services as confirmation of the district's excellence. But is there really no more than one family that wishes to change schools? If there are others, what is limiting their exercise of choice? And why aren't parents taking advantage of the supplemental services by private providers that are guaranteed to them under the law?

PHOTOGRAPH BY CORBIS

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Obviously, the implementation of any major piece of legislation proceeds in fits and starts, making it much too early to proclaim NCLB an unmitigated success or failure. Nevertheless, for reasons inherent in the writing of the law, districts' incentives to implement it, and parents' current knowledge of its provisions, early returns suggest that NCLB is not likely to revolutionize public education in Worcester anytime soon.

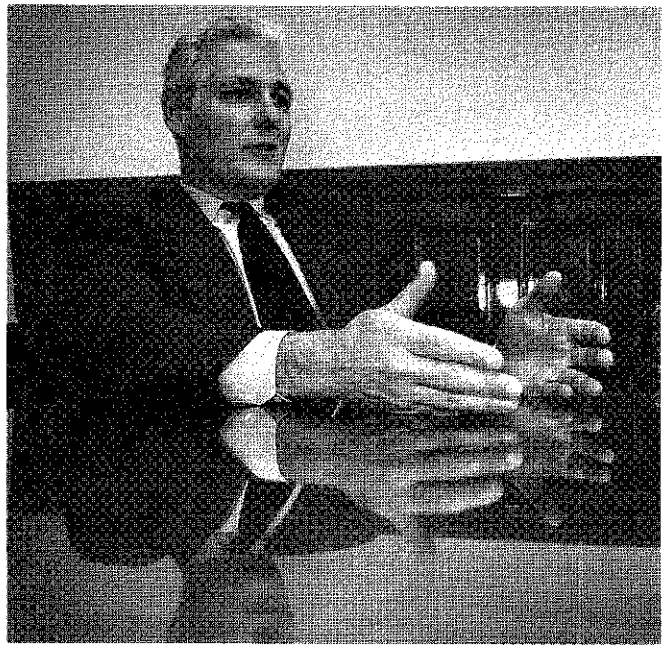
Already on the Move

Worcester is the third largest school system in the state of Massachusetts, serving roughly 25,000 students in 46 public schools (36 elementary, 4 middle, 5 high, and one pre-K–12 school). The federal government provides just 10 percent of the district's $265 million annual budget, with state appropriations, local contributions, grants, and revolving funds covering the balance.

Worcester's schools house an increasingly diverse and disadvantaged population of students. During the past two decades, the percentage of nonwhite students has more than doubled, from roughly 20 percent in 1980 to slightly more than 50 percent in 2002. The district provides 7 percent of its students, representing no fewer than 50 different languages, with English as a Second Language (ESL) tutorial programs. More than 50 percent of the district's students qualify for the federal lunch program, a common measure of disadvantage. And on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)—the state's standardized test, first administered in the spring of 1998—Worcester public school students in different grade levels were 8 to 20 percentage points less likely to score at or above proficiency than were students statewide.

Making matters worse, Worcester's schools serve an extremely mobile population of families. Between 1999 and 2002, on average, 23 to 37 percent of elementary students changed schools within a given academic year; among middle schools, mobility rates ranged from 24 to 32 percent; and for high schools, from 24 to 28 percent. Much of this movement occurred across district lines. For instance, during the 2001–02 school year, 12 percent of Worcester elementary students changed schools and another 21 percent left the district altogether. That such a high proportion of Worcester's families are moving in and out of the district exacerbates the problems of tracking students and delivering a coherent education program.

Schools that failed to meet their "adequate yearly progress" targets, as required by NCLB, serve some of the most mobile student populations. Among those elementary schools that were deemed in need of improvement between 1999 and 2001, mobility rates reached as high as 51 percent. When determining whether a school has made adequate progress, the state does not account for these mobility rates—a fact that almost every public official in the district is quick to point out. "You really can only determine whether you're making progress or not if you're testing the same kids, year after year," says Worcester mayor Timothy Murray. "And that's something that is not lost, I think, on parents or the School Committee."



The No Child Left Behind Act "looks great" but it is "killing teachers and killing principals," says James Caradonio, superintendent of the Worcester, Massachusetts, school district.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE WORCESTER TELEGRAM

It should come as no surprise that administrators have subtly, and

The causes of mobility vary widely, though by most accounts it has little to do with parents seeking better schools. As Brian O'Connell, vice chair of the city's School Committee, notes, "Parents are moving from one apartment to another or husband and wife separate, mother and boyfriend separate, evictions take place, friends go off, parents move, parents are homeless, parents leave in November to go back to Puerto Rico and come back in the spring and come back to a different school."

In short, even without satisfying the choice provisions of the new law, the Worcester school district must cope with a dizzying amount of movement in and out of its schools. Schools struggle just to keep track of their students from year to year. Moreover, the district already provides a significant amount of choice. During the 2002–03 school year, only 61 percent of students attended their neighborhood public school. The rest attended one of two charter schools or six citywide magnet schools, participated in the interdistrict choice program, or joined in the district's desegregation plan.

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Friendly Discouragement

Ultimately, districts are responsible for informing parents of their rights and opportunities under NCLB. But given the challenges that Worcester faces, along with the incentives to safeguard public finances, it should come as no surprise that administrators subtly, and not so subtly, discouraged families from transferring their children out of underperforming schools.

In the spring of 2003, the district notified families at underperforming schools of their rights under NCLB. The designation "in need of improvement," the letters explained, "means that although these schools are succeeding in some areas, there is still room for growth." After highlighting limitations of the NCLB grading system, the letter underscored unattractive features of the law's choice provisions. For example, "In most instances, because of space limitations, we may not be able to transfer every child in a family to the same school." Furthermore, the letter noted, families with children at underperforming schools who switch schools forfeit their rights to supplemental services.

The letter goes on to cite many exciting developments in Worcester public schools. "We believe that your child's school is on its way towards achieving the NCLB goals. The principal and teachers at your child's school have implemented new programs and services during the school day as well as after school. These include: a proven literacy approach designed to meet the individual needs of the students; the Everyday Mathematics program for students in grades K–6; an after-school program to help students improve MCAS scores; and other special programs."

not so subtly, discouraged parents from transferring their children.

The district then set up a multistage procedure for parents to exercise their right to choose another school. The first step involves a meeting between a parent and her child's principal, wherein the parent has an opportunity to explain why she is unhappy with her child's school. The principal can then clarify the problems with NCLB and show why the family ought to stay put. Principals also explain why students are best served by receiving supplemental services within their schools. (The district offers an academically based after-school program for Title I students, which qualifies as supplemental services under NCLB. More than 800 students are currently enrolled in this program.)

Not surprisingly, very few parents requested a meeting with their principal. According to Elaine De Araujo, principal of Harlow Street Elementary School, "Nobody has wanted to change. Not one parent has come forward. If you were here, you would see why. You would see what a nurturing, wonderful place this is." Ruthann Melancon, the principal of Elm Park Elementary School, notes, "A couple of parents came to me thinking that the school was going to close. I sat down with these sets of parents and reassured them. They've been here since preschool and they have liked what they've seen." Under NCLB, both Harlow Street and Elm Park have failed to make adequate progress every year that the schools have been evaluated.

If, after consulting with the school principal, parents still want to change schools, they must schedule yet another meeting at the Parent Information Center. Robert Vartanian, the center's director, says that he has met with just two families interested in NCLB choice, and only one of those families ended up switching their child to a different school. Each time, Vartanian has taken the opportunity to reiterate many of the points made by the school principal. Perhaps most consequentially, though, Vartanian informs parents that the district may not be able to accommodate their request to attend any specific school. Indeed, since the district is obligated only to offer parents a choice of two schools that did make adequate progress, that is all they can expect to receive. There are also no guarantees that either of these schools will be near the family's home or that transportation will be provided over the longer term of a child's education. As district official Joan Fitton explains, "The feds told us we had to offer a choice, not the parents' choice, but a choice."

Standing on the Sidelines

The Worcester district also uses its control over the flow of information to limit the influence of NCLB's supplemental services provision. While the district can advertise its tutoring and after-school services directly to parents, private providers hoping to capture a piece of this market have few opportunities to get their foot in the door. As Seppy Basili, vice president of Kaplan K12 Learning Services, notes, "The school district is the owner of the relationship between provider and the parent. And I can't get in." The five companies with contracts to provide supplemental services in Massachusetts—Brainfuse (The Trustforte Corporation), Huntington Learning Centers, Kaplan K12 Learning Services, Princeton Review, and the Summit Educational Group—do not even know which students are eligible for Title I funding and, thus, supplemental services. Therefore they must rely on the district and its representatives to present their services to parents in as favorable a light as possible.

Curiously though, private providers are not complaining yet—at least publicly—perhaps for fear of alienating district administrators, on whose cooperation and goodwill they depend. Meanwhile, for some companies that provide private

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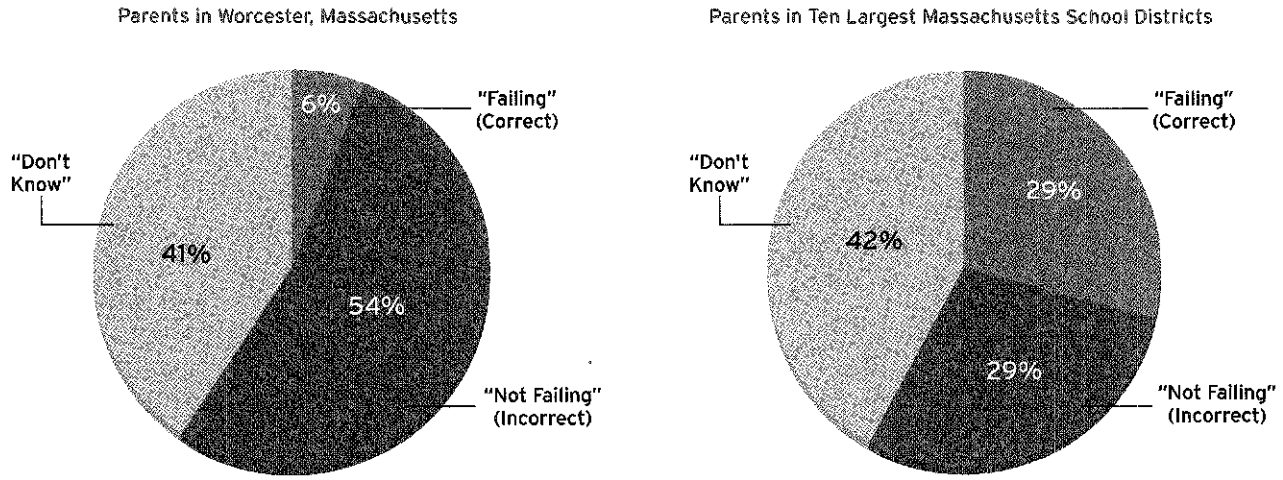
Status Unknown (Figure 1)

When Worcester parents with children in failing schools were asked if they knew of this fact, just 6 percent answered correctly. Just 29 percent of parents in the ten largest school districts in Massachusetts knew their child was attending a failing school.

Responses from Parents with Children in Failing Schools When Asked the Status of Their Child's School Under NCLB



Note: Percentages total more than 100 percent due to rounding. Survey was of a stratified random sample of 1,000 public school parents conducted in the summer of 2003. Worcester sub-sample was 250 parents. "In need of improvement" is official term for what has generally become known as failing schools.

SOURCE: Author

tutoring, the state-mandated amount involved ($1,238 per year, per student in Worcester) is simply insufficient to warrant serious investment.

For instance, Huntington Learning Centers, which have the distinct honor of having served the only Worcester student to obtain supplemental services from outside of the public school system, typically contract with families for 100 to 150 hours of individual tutoring. The Title I money available for supplemental services, however, covers just 30 to 40 hours of tutoring, which would require either an abbreviated or an entirely restructured program. Notes Mark Shobin, the owner of three Huntington franchises in Massachusetts, "From a financial perspective, it doesn't make sense for us to try to corral these students into our program. We are happy to work with and develop programs for those students who seek us out. But I am not going to seek them out."

Transportation problems further inhibit parents' interest in sending their child to private providers. "We don't provide transportation for supplemental services," explains Joan Fitton. "And neither do the supplemental service providers provide transportation. So, there, right away, is a big glitch in the whole program. We're not required to provide transportation. And, to be honest, to send money out of the district, I'm not sure that we would even offer to do that." As long as children continue with their own school's program, parents need not worry about transporting them across town during the middle of the day. The district benefits as well, since it avoids losing Title I funds to private providers.

What Parents Know and Want

Many parents in Worcester simply do not know much about their school's performance or their rights under NCLB. In a telephone survey conducted during the summer of 2003, public school parents routinely expressed confusion over basic points of fact. Overall, 25 percent of parents surveyed in Worcester had children who attended underperforming schools. However, when asked whether their child's school was on the list of underperforming schools, just 6 percent of parents said yes, 54 percent said no, and 41 percent said that they did not know (see Figure 1). Fully 93 percent of parents of children in underperforming public schools either did not know that their school was deemed in need of improvement or incorrectly thought that their child attended a school that had made adequate yearly progress.

As one might expect, levels of knowledge varied depending on parents' socioeconomic status and ethnicity. Whereas 54 percent of whites knew whether their child attended an underperforming school, just 28 percent of African-Americans and Hispanics did. Just 26 percent of parents born outside of the United States and 17 percent of parents of children who receive English as a Second Language instruction knew whether their school was underperforming.

Are parents interested in choice? Among those with children in underperforming schools, just 13 percent said there was another public school in the district to which they were interested in sending their children (see Figure 2). By comparison, 8 percent of parents of children in schools that had made adequate yearly progress said they were interested in another school. Consistent with these responses, parents appeared to be satisfied with their public schools. Eighty-

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seven percent of parents with children in schools that made adequate progress gave their school an A or a B, as did 80 percent of parents with children in underperforming schools.

However, interest in choice spiked when the options included private schools. Fully 58 percent of parents with children in underperforming schools said that they would rather send their child to a private school than their current public school (see Figure 2), compared with 39 percent of parents with children in schools that made adequate progress. When asked, "If costs were not an obstacle, which type of school would you most like your child to attend?" 49 percent of parents with children in underperforming schools picked a private school, 44 percent a public school in their district, 4 percent a public school outside of the district, and just 2 percent a charter school.

The clause "if costs were not an obstacle" apparently freed up some parents' imaginations to consider elite (read: expensive) private schools. When asked to name a preferred private school, roughly half named independent private schools (the most popular being Worcester Academy and Milton Academy), with tuitions that eclipse the values of even the most generous school vouchers offered in public and private programs across the country. The rest identified a Catholic or Protestant day school, most of which were located within or near the city of Worcester.

Misalignments of information, interests, and schooling options have effectively limited NCLB's influence in Worcester. Those parents who qualify for public school choice and supplemental services are the least likely to know it; fewer than one in ten parents with children in schools that failed to make adequate progress could correctly identify their school's status. Meanwhile, Worcester parents are most interested in pursuing schooling alternatives that NCLB does not furnish.

The Road Ahead

In Worcester distrust of NCLB runs rampant. While many principals extol the benefits of using student achievement data as a diagnostic tool, officials downtown remain deeply suspicious of the longer-term consequences that will accompany repeated failures to make adequate yearly progress. Notes Caradonio, "We're screwed. This whole thing has been set up to make sure it looks bad so we can bring in the miracle drugs, the vouchers, and all this is very clear." School Committee member Kathleen Toomey expressed much the same sentiment to the town newspaper. "[NCLB] is one way to promote flight out of city schools," she said. "Proponents of charter schools will be able to say, 'Look, see, those public schools are not working.'" Local officials have assumed a defensive posture, poised at every opportunity to minimize the impact of a law that they think is designed to set them up for failure.

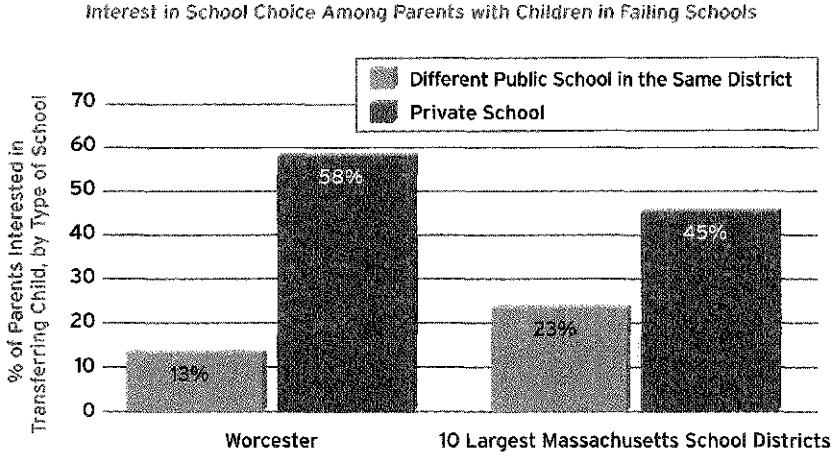
Some short-term solutions may encourage higher participation rates. It is sheer folly, for instance, to expect school districts to vigorously implement an accountability scheme that disrupts their school assignment procedures, drains money from their coffers, and threatens their administrative autonomy. Until an independent organization is established that disseminates information about which schools are underperforming, which students qualify for choice and supplemental services, and which providers are available, there is little reason to expect that NCLB will induce an exodus of students from underperforming schools.

However, even if an independent agency were established, a massive reallocation of students and resources would be unlikely. The district will continue to pursue its strategies of blame avoidance. If the survey results are any indication, few qualifying families appear likely to switch to a different public school. And as the number of schools failing to make adequate progress grows, the number of options remaining for families will only dwindle.

–William G. Howell is an assistant professor of government at Harvard University.

Going Private or Bust (Figure 2)

Just 13 percent of Worcester parents with children in failing schools said there was another public school in the district to which they were interested in sending their children. Interest in switching schools grew dramatically when parents were offered the option of transferring their children to a private school.



Note: Survey of a stratified random sample of 1,000 public school parents conducted in the summer of 2003. Worcester sub-sample was 250 parents.

SOURCE: Author

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A progress report on urban school districts' efforts to execute the mandates of No Child Left Behind

by MICHAEL CASSERLY

The leadership of America's large urban school systems supported the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) as the legislation was heading to the House and Senate floors because of its intent to improve performance and close achievement gaps. But at the same time city leaders were wary, for the bill contained something seldom seen in federal education law: sanctions. Public schools that did not make "adequate yearly progress" faced an escalating set of consequences.

For starters, students in schools with two consecutive years of inadequate gains in their test scores must be offered the opportunity to transfer to another public school. After three consecutive years of inadequate gains, schools must also provide their students with "supplemental services," such as after-school tutoring. Two later stages of sanctions, "corrective action" and "restructuring," apply to schools that have not made adequate progress for several consecutive years. At these stages, the consequences can range from firing staff to closing down the school.

These accountability measures are intended to spur higher academic performance and to provide children in underperforming schools with better opportunities.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CORBIS

Driving

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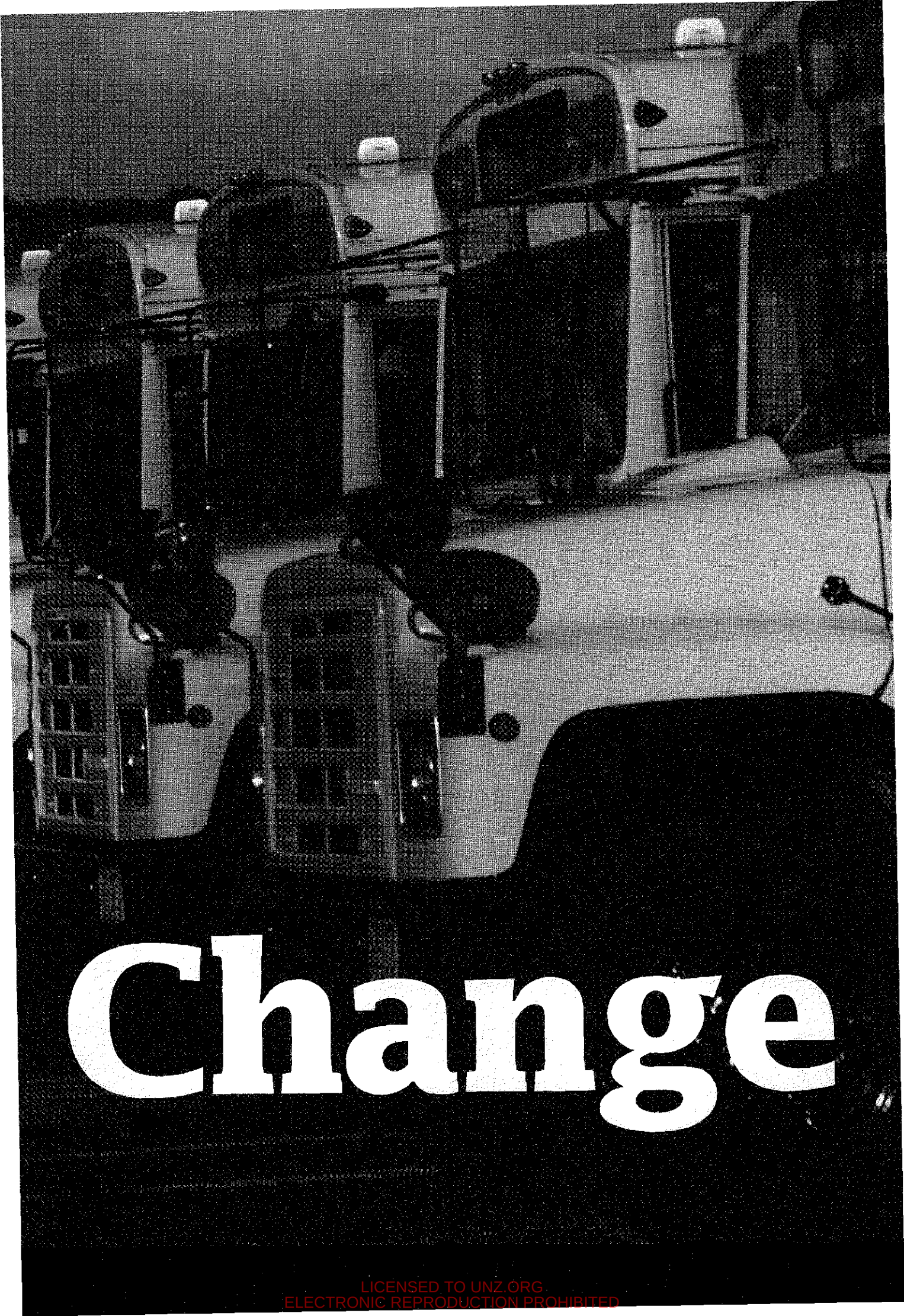

Change

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The measures are also punitive in the sense that schools and school districts face both additional administrative burdens and increased expenses if they do not make sufficient progress.

Local school districts are two years into the implementation of the law, enough time to start asking how they are doing. To investigate their progress, the Council of the Great City Schools conducted a survey of its 60 member urban school districts and requested data on two of the measure's accountability provisions: choice and supplemental services. Results from the 46 districts that responded as of November 2003 suggest that urban districts are implementing the requirements in these two areas, but are confronting a number of challenges as they do so.

Varying Results

During the 2003–04 school year, 498 schools in the 46 cities that participated in the survey were required to offer their students the opportunity to switch to a higher-performing school because of two consecutive years of inadequate progress. Another 510 schools were required to provide their students with supplemental services. Finally, 471 schools were identified for corrective action and 215 for restructuring. Altogether, schools that were at one of the various stages of school improvement composed 21 percent of all schools and about a third of all Title I schools in these cities. Among these 46 cities, eight cities were in "district improvement" status because their schools had not made satisfactory progress systemwide.

The number of schools in various stages of school improvement varied dramatically from city to city. For instance, Philadelphia has 194 of its public schools, about 74 percent, in one stage of sanctions or another. Likewise, more than half the schools in Chicago and Buffalo are in various stages of the school improvement process. By contrast, cities like Austin and Dallas have no schools being sanctioned.

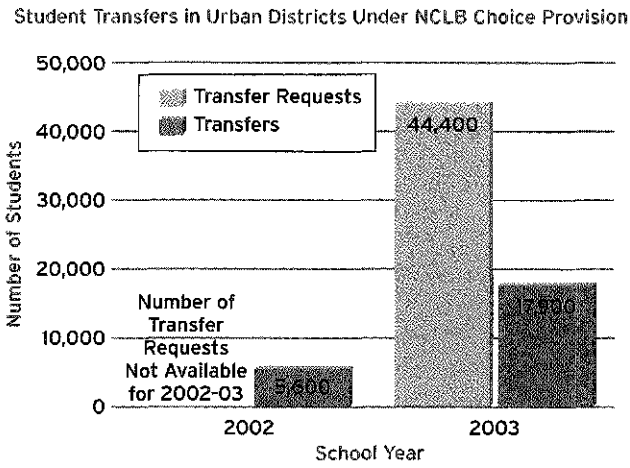
For the most part, these disparities do not reflect genuine differences in student learning. For example, schoolchildren in Boston and San Diego perform similarly on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, yet 31 percent of Boston's schools are in the improvement process, compared with just 18 percent of San Diego's. Instead, the disparities are the result of Congress's decision to let the states define their own standards of performance.

Public School Choice

The choice provision of No Child Left Behind is proving to be one of the most difficult parts of the law for urban schools to implement. Participation rates are low, though increasing somewhat. Some 1.2 million students in these cities were eligible to transfer to another public school during the 2003–04 school year; 44,000 requested a transfer; and 17,900 actually moved (see Figure 1). Nonetheless, this was more than triple the number of transfers from the previous year.

Few Students Move (Figure 1)

Less than 1 percent of students eligible to transfer schools under No Child Left Behind actually did so for the 2003–04 school year. Nevertheless, that represented more than triple the number of transfers from the previous year.



Note: 41 of the 46 school districts surveyed had at least one school that was required to implement the school choice provision of No Child Left Behind.

SOURCE: Council of the Great City Schools, November 2003

City officials, community groups, and others suggest a variety of reasons why the number of transfers has been low so far. Some parents do not want their children taking lengthy bus trips or riding public transportation. Some parents prefer having their children close to home. Some received information about their children's eligibility and options too late to make a good decision. Some parents may not have gotten their first choice of school. Some do not consider the available options any better than their current situations. And some are frustrated by complicated application procedures. No one factor appears to explain the lack of movement.

The main method of communicating with parents was through the mail; all 41 districts that were required to offer transfers sent letters to parents informing them of their options. Twenty-two districts supplemented the mail with website information, newsletters, flyers, phone calls, parent and community meetings, advertisements, or media announcements.

New York City was particularly aggressive with its efforts. The school system posted first-class mail and placed automated telephone calls in ten languages; sent flyers home in backpacks; convened regional information sessions; sought help from some 20 community-based organizations; provided materials at local PTA meetings; established a chancellor's hotline; set up a special website; and placed ads in community newspapers. These extra measures are important, since the high mobility rates in urban districts make it difficult to reach parents through mail alone. Still, there were parents and groups in New York and other

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cities who indicated that they did not get the information or that insufficient notification was provided. It is likely that some parents were missed.

One of the difficulties with informing parents was that none of the cities knew how many of their schools would be deemed "in need of improvement" before the end of the previous school year. For the 2003–04 school year, of the 46 districts, 14 did not receive their final test-score data from the state until August. Another 21 did not receive their data until after the new school year had begun (see Figure 2).

In the end, only nine districts were able to inform parents of their options before the end of the previous school year. All of these districts already had a districtwide open enrollment or "controlled choice" plan in place and were able to make an educated guess as to which students were likely to be eligible for a transfer under NCLB. Seven districts could not inform parents of their options until August, while 14 notified parents after the beginning of the 2003–04 school year.

School Capacity and Choice

All but two of the responding districts gave parents more than one choice of schools. The norm was to grant parents two or three options. New York City, however, offers eight choices, while Philadelphia, Jacksonville, Florida, Columbus, Ohio, and Nashville, Tennessee, offer six choices each.

Because demand was low, most districts were able to accommodate all or most of the students requesting transfers. For instance, the Miami-Dade County school district was able to accommodate all 321 of its transfer requests. New York City, with 8,000 requests, permitted every student to transfer.

Cities experiencing the most difficulty tend to lack the physical capacity to accommodate those transfers, have large numbers of schools identified for improvement, and have small numbers of schools eligible to receive students.

Take Philadelphia. The district itself has been deemed "in need of improvement." Of its 261 schools, 34 are in Level I school improvement and 160 are in corrective action; together, these schools enroll some 100,000 eligible students. The district was able to locate just 1,240 open seats in 20 higher-performing schools that were eligible to receive students. And all of the surrounding districts rejected Philadelphia's requests for seats, a situation that was mirrored, as far as I know, in all the other cities.

As it turned out, there were only 1,000 requests for transfers. But if in the coming years the number of requests grows substantially, the district may have little room for them. Philadelphia is discussing options to send students to parochial schools, but these schools also appear to have limited space, some private school parents are balking, and legal barriers remain.

It appears that the choice provisions are also causing some problems for the receiving schools. Most of the difficulty appears to relate to overcrowding and increased class sizes. The Portland, Oregon, schools, for instance, saw the average class sizes in high schools from which students were transferred dip to 22 students, while class sizes in receiving schools increased to 30. Class sizes in some receiving middle schools in New York City jumped to more than 40, a number that could have a dampening effect on student achievement.

We have seen little evidence, to date, that strategies proposed by the U.S. Department of Education, including creating schools within schools, delivering services through virtual schools, and housing students in mobile classroom units, are creating enough space to overcome capacity problems. These strategies are often too small-scale (virtual schools) or too expensive (mobile classrooms) to absorb the large numbers of students who are eligible to transfer.

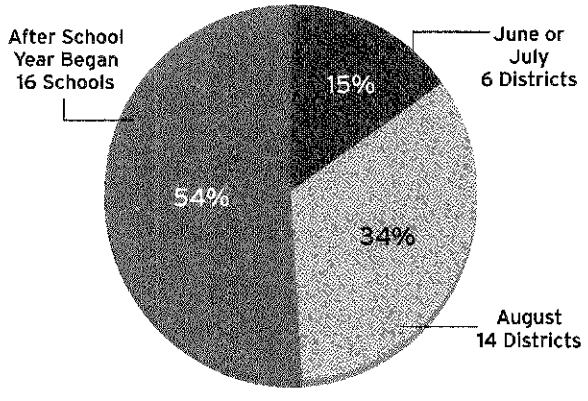
Supplemental Services

The law also requires districts to offer tutorial services to students enrolled in schools that have failed to make adequate yearly progress for at least three years. To obtain these services, parents can select a public or private provider

Late Notice (Figure 2)

A majority of the large urban school districts with schools in need of improvement were not given the data that determined the status of their schools until after the next school year had begun. Consequently, these districts had little time to implement the provisions of No Child Left Behind in the 2003–04 school year.

Date by Which Districts Were Provided Data on Schools' Status
2003-04 School Year



Note: 5 of the 46 school districts surveyed had no schools in need of improvement under No Child Left Behind.

SOURCE: Council of the Great City Schools, November 2003

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from a list of state-approved providers. School districts are then required to contract with the providers to deliver services.

So far, urban districts are providing Title I supplemental services to considerably more students than are taking advantage of the choice options. Of the 46 districts, 32 have at least one school that is required to offer supplemental services under NCLB. These districts indicated that they expected to serve some 134,000 students this school year in a supplemental service program.

Students may be participating in supplemental services in greater numbers than in choice programs because of the educational nature of the services, the ability to provide services on school property, and the latitude of school districts to provide their own services.

The number of state-approved providers in any one city ranges from as few as six in Greenville, South Carolina, to as many as 59 in New York City. Only four cities—Albuquerque, Boston, Greenville, and Portland—have ten or fewer state-approved providers. The average city has approximately 24 state-approved providers (see Figure 3).

This ratio suggests that there may be a glut of providers in some locales. For instance, Cleveland has 38 approved providers but only 15 schools in Level II school improvement or corrective action. Buffalo has 43 providers, but just 22 schools required their services. The apparent oversupply of providers in some sites may spur competition, but it may also be contributing to the frustration the providers feel concerning the small numbers of students in their programs.

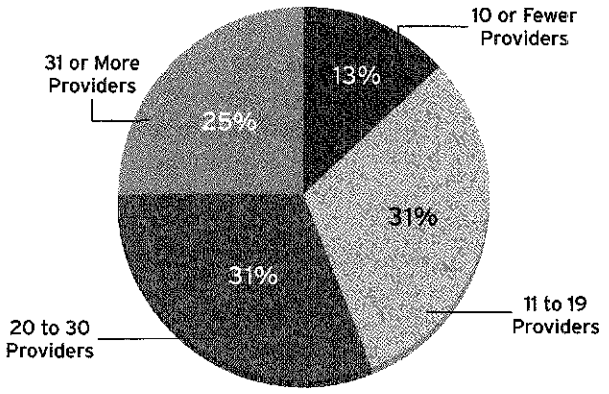
The types of providers vary widely from city to city. For instance, Cleveland's list includes such large national tutorial services as Huntington Learning Centers, Kaplan K12 Learning Services, Sylvan Learning, and the Princeton Review. A number of small to mid-size out-of-town providers are also on the list, including Brainfuse Online, Academia.net, JRL Enterprises, Kumon Reading and Math Centers, Club Z, and Elluminate. And the list contains such smaller local providers as Village One Concepts, Wims Enterprises, Learning for All, and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Cleveland.

A review of providers in other cities shows that several publishers and curriculum developers, like Lightspan, Voyager, Plato, CompassLearning, and Mosaica, are also starting to appear on state lists of approved providers. Some companies and providers are specializing in a single content area, like reading, while others concentrate on particular grades or grade spans. Few colleges or universities or faith-based groups appear on any of the state lists. And only a few private school-management firms, like Edison Schools, are evident. Just 18 of the 46 school districts were approved to be their own supplemental services providers.

Many Options for Supplemental Services (Figure 3)

Of the large urban school districts that were required to provide students with supplemental services, more than 50 percent gave parents a choice from among 20 or more service providers.

Urban School Districts by Number of Supplemental Service Providers
2003-04 School Year



Note: 14 of the 46 surveyed school districts had no schools required to provide supplemental education services in 2003-04.

SOURCE: Council of the Great City Schools, November 2003

Contracts and Services

As school districts and potential providers attempt to hammer out contracts, they have found themselves tussling over a number of details, including the length of the contracts, per-pupil fees, billing and payment procedures, staff qualifications, union rules, and the like.

For instance, many providers would like to receive a portion of their fees before work begins, but the districts often prefer to pay as the work proceeds. The providers would like to charge the districts a flat fee for the number of students enrolled in the tutorial sessions, but the districts want to be charged only for the number of students who actually attend the instructional sessions. The providers would like to build transportation fees into their overhead charges, but the districts generally disallow these expenses because the law does not authorize them.

Conflicts have also arisen about educational aspects of the supplemental services. The providers sometimes would like to use their own assessment tools to evaluate their services, while the districts want to evaluate the providers using state or local assessments. The providers would like to retain the nature of their services as they were designed, while the districts want services to be aligned with district curricula. The providers want the right to reject students with disabilities or English language learners on the grounds that they require specialized services and facilities that

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they do not have. The districts would like the providers to serve all those who are eligible, including students with disabilities and English language learners.

The next major tasks that both the districts and providers must address are the alignment of supplemental services with the curriculum and the evaluation of providers' effectiveness. Alignment issues are more acute with providers who come with prepackaged curricula or ready-to-use materials. Providers often have to attest that their programs are aligned with state standards, but it is hard to imagine that this is really the case, particularly for providers working in multiple states.

Many urban school districts are discovering that they make the greatest academic gains when they use a more cohesive, less splintered, and sometimes more prescriptive instructional program. Often these curricula come with assessments that are used by teachers to gauge the specific skills of individual students. Districts with the best instructional results often have very specific requirements or materials for their after-school interventions that may or may not be consistent with what the individual service providers are prepared to use.

The challenge is further complicated when the district uses a detailed pacing guide that specifies, often on a weekly basis, when specified skills are taught. These pacing guides are usually aligned with state tests in a way that ensures teachers teach the skills measured on the state test before the test is given, rather than after. Aligning service providers with this practice has not even started yet, but is likely to occur in the next year or two. The ability to get this process right will determine in large measure whether the supplemental services provision of the law spurs student achievement.

The districts also face evaluation and assessment challenges. The law requires states to develop ways to monitor approved providers and to withdraw approval from those that fail to help increase student learning. The law is ambiguous, however, about who is supposed to assess the providers and how the evaluations are to be conducted.

The vast majority of districts required to provide supplemental services are using only Title I funds to pay for these services and for choice programs. So far, most of the expense has been covered by the sizable increases in federal Title I funds districts have received over the past two years. For instance, Denver is setting aside $2.5 million for choice and another $1.7 million for supplemental services, or about 18.8 percent of its Title I allocation, but the total has absorbed the lion's share of the district's $5.5 million increase in Title I revenues in the first year of NCLB—leaving about $1.3 million or about $29.15 per student for overall program improvement.

In some districts, the poor economy wiped out any benefits from increases in Title I funds. For instance, the Buffalo school district had to cut about $37.5 million from its general budget in 2002–03, dwarfing the $10.5 million increase in Title I funding the district received between fiscal years 2001 and 2003. And the Oakland schools absorbed some $63 million in state and local cuts, an amount that overshadowed the $8.4 million increase the district saw in Title I funding.

Conclusion

It is still early in the implementation of No Child Left Behind to judge its choice and supplemental service provisions. Many cities are just getting started this year. But the preliminary data suggest that the programs are taking shape on the ground, even if the increases in the numbers of participating students are not as high as many would eventually like to see.

It is also clear that the law is experiencing growing pains. The implementation of choice and supplemental services is causing frustration among the urban school leaders who otherwise back NCLB. One hears very little carping among urban leaders about those NCLB components that are more directly linked, in their view, to student performance and accountability—the provisions for adequate yearly progress, testing, data disaggregation, report cards, and professional development. At this early stage of implementation, carrying out the requirements for choice and supplemental services is absorbing substantial amounts of time, expertise, and resources without a clear connection to what NCLB purports to be about—student performance. Many urban leaders see less energy being devoted at the federal and state levels to raising achievement than to implementing the law's sanctions.

Nevertheless, urban school leaders tend to feel more positive toward this legislation than do many of their suburban and rural counterparts. This may owe to the fact that suburban and rural schools are less accustomed to having their test scores publicized and scrutinized than are urban schools. In the minds of many urban educators, the law remains the single most important piece of federal education legislation to emerge in a generation. Its goals of raising achievement, closing achievement gaps, and strengthening accountability are exactly what the best urban educators in the country have been working for. Eventually, No Child Left Behind and the paradigm shift it represents are likely to give the nation exactly what it wants urban schools to deliver—more choice and higher achievement. Once that happens, urban schools will have succeeded in meeting a challenge as ambitious as any nation has set for its schools. And they will have made their initial support for the law worth the effort.

–Michael Casserly is executive director of the Washington, D.C.–based Council of the Great City Schools.

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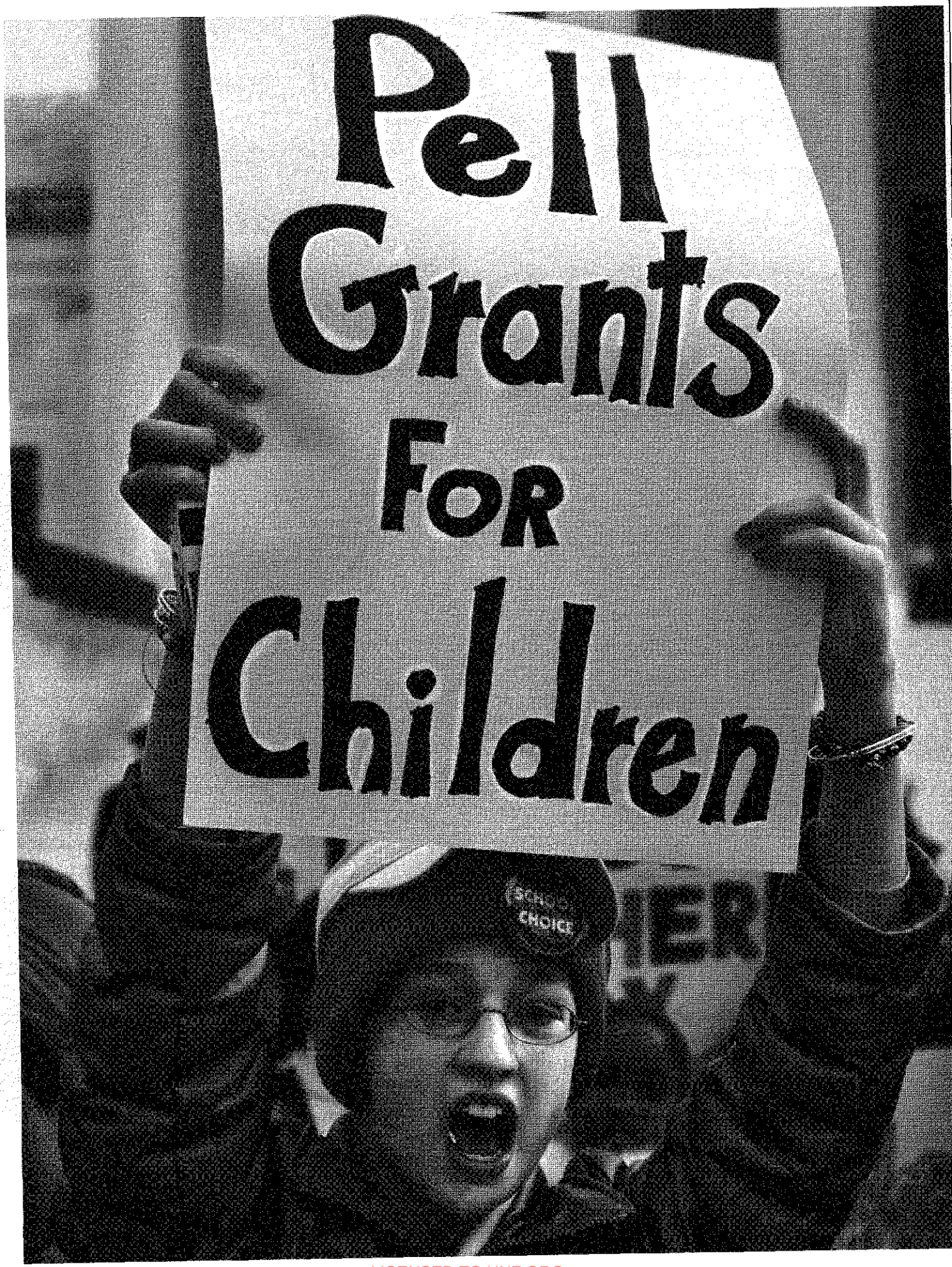

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putting Parents in Charge

Let's promote competition, high standards, and autonomy in K–12 education. After all, it worked for America's colleges and universities

In 1990, as the new president of the University of Tennessee, I was trying to understand what had made American colleges and universities the best in the world. I asked David Gardner, then the president of the University of California, why his university has such a tradition of excellence. "First," he said, "autonomy. The California constitution created four branches of government, with the university being the fourth. The legislature basically turns over money to us without many rules about how to spend it.

"The second is excellence. We were fortunate, at our beginning, to have a corps of faculty dedicated to high standards. That tradition has continued. And third, generous amounts of federal—and state—money have followed students to the schools of their choice. That has increased opportunity for those who couldn't afford college, created choices that make good fits between the student and the school, and stimulated competition that encouraged excellent programs."

Autonomy. High standards. Government dollars following students to the schools of their choice. That was the formula for the GI Bill, passed by Congress in 1944. The program gave World War II veterans scholarships redeemable at any accredited institution, public or private. Those veterans who didn't hold a diploma could even use the scholarships at Catholic high schools. With these scholarships came few federal rules, thus preserving the universities' autonomy. And by allowing students to choose their college, the GI Bill encouraged excellence and discouraged weak programs.

Not all university leaders welcomed the program. "It will

PHOTOGRAPH BY STEPHANIE KUYKENDAL

by LAMAR ALEXANDER

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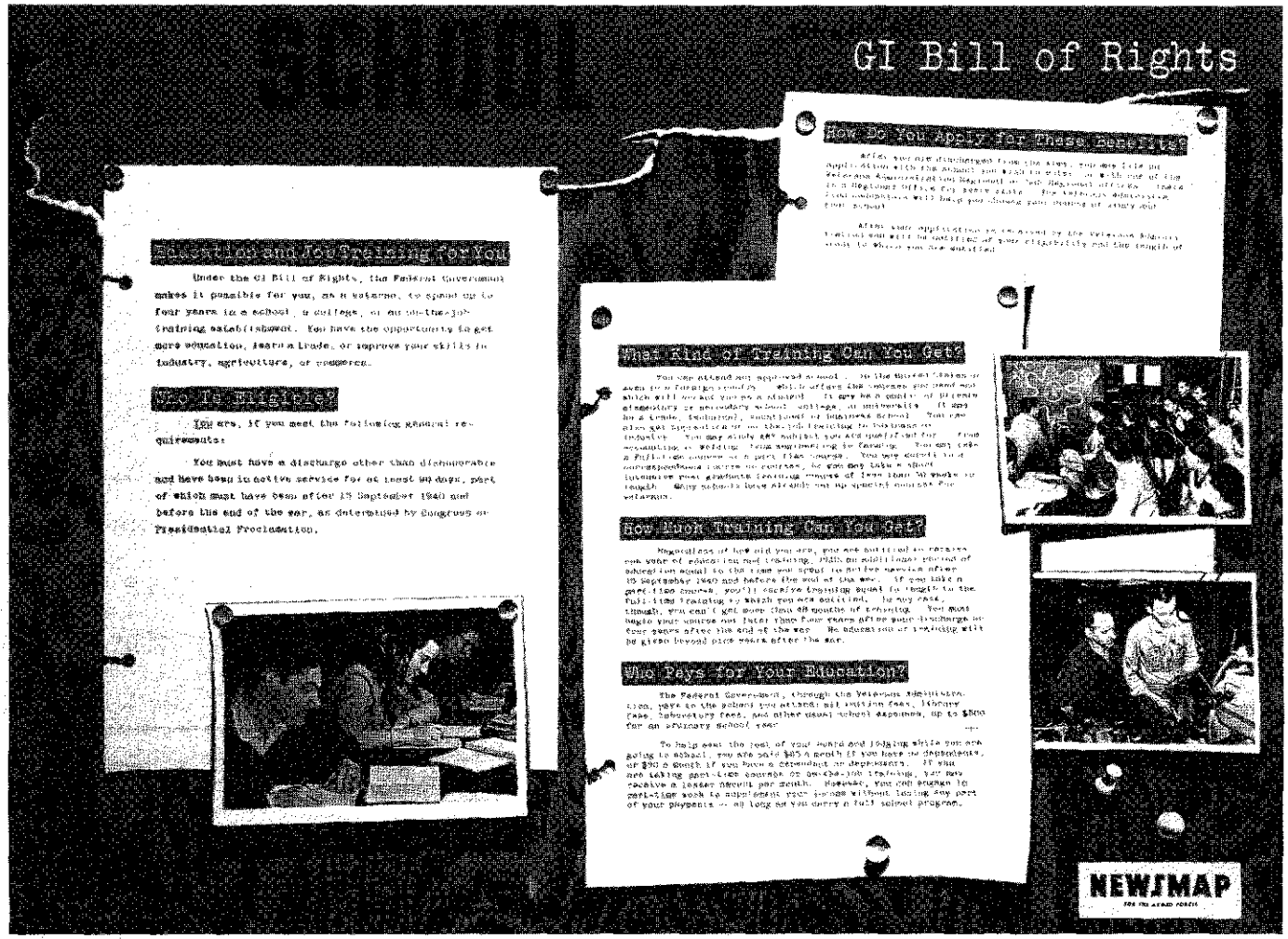
GI Bill of Rights
How Do You Apply for these Benefits?
Education and Job Training for You
Under the GI Bill of Rights, the Federal Government makes it possible for you, as a veteran, to spend up to four years in a school, a college, or an on-the-job-training establishment. You have the opportunity to get more education, learn a trade, or improve your skills in industry, agriculture, or commerce.
Who Is Eligible?
You are, if you meet the following general requirements:
You must have a discharge other than dishonorable and have been in active service for at least 90 days, part of which must have been after 15 September 1940 and before the end of the war, as determined by Congress or Presidential Proclamation.
What Kind of Training Can You Get?
How Much Training Can You Get?
Who Pays for Your Education?
NEWSMAP

The GI Bill became the most successful piece of social legislation Congress ever enacted. It is the model for the federal grants and loans that today follow 58 percent of America's college students to the schools of their choice.

create a hobo's jungle," warned legendary University of Chicago president Robert Hutchins. Instead, the GI Bill became the most successful piece of social legislation Congress ever enacted. It became the model for the federal grants and loans that today follow 58 percent of America's college students to the schools of their choice. In 1972, when Congress debated whether future federal funding for higher education should go directly to institutions or be channeled through students, the model of the GI Bill helped carry the day for the latter approach, which was surely the right one. Pell Grants (named for Sen. Claiborne Pell, D-R.I.), Stafford Loans, and other forms of financial assistance to students followed. This year the federal government will spend nearly $17 billion on grants and work-study programs and will provide an additional $52 billion in student loans.

Rarely has the federal taxpayer gotten so much bang for the buck. These federal vouchers trained the "greatest generation" and made it possible for a greater percentage of Americans to continue into higher education than in any other country. At the time of the GI Bill's passage in 1944, only about 6 percent of Americans held a four-year college degree. Today that figure stands at 26 percent.

Moreover, these scholarships have strengthened public institutions. At the end of World War II, 50 percent of American college students were attending public institutions. Today 76 percent choose to attend public colleges and universities. So many foreign students want to attend American universities that some institutions impose caps in order to make room for lower-achieving homegrown students. British prime minister Tony Blair is overhauling his nation's system of higher education because he sees a growing gap between the quality of American and British universities. Likewise, former Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso recently told a small group of U.S. senators that the most important thing he would remember about his residency at the Library of Congress

COURTESY OF HOOVER INSTITUTION ARCHIVES

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By allowing students to choose their college, the GI Bill encouraged excellence and discouraged weak programs.

is "the uniqueness, strength, and autonomy of the American university."

Meanwhile, federal support for elementary and secondary education has taken just the opposite approach—with opposite results. Instead of allowing tax dollars to follow students to the schools of their parents' choice, the federal government gives $35 billion directly to the schools themselves (or to the states, which then give it to schools). In addition, thousands of pages of federal and state regulations govern how these funds are spent, thereby diminishing each school's autonomy. Measured by student learning, rarely has the taxpayer gotten so little bang for so many bucks. In 1999, 8th-grade students in this country were ranked 19th in math and 18th in science compared with 38 other industrialized nations. The National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the nation's report card, shows other alarming trends. For example, between 1996 and 2000, the gap between affluent and poorer U.S. students actually widened in seven out of nine key indicators—like reading, math, and science. Two out of every three African-American and Hispanic 4th graders could barely read. Seventy percent of children in high-poverty schools scored below even the most basic level of reading.

Enhancing Local Control

It is time to try a different funding approach, and Pell Grants, the college scholarships offered to low-income students, provide a useful model. Congress should enact "Pell Grants for Kids," which would provide a $500 scholarship to each middle- and low-income child in America. Children could use these scholarships at any public or private school or for any educational program, such as private tutoring. Homeschooled children would also be eligible for the scholarship, as long as the money was spent on an accredited educational program. Overall, the grant would be available to about 60 percent of America's 50 million primary and secondary school students, those whose families earn $53,000 or less. It would put the parents of approximately 30 million children directly into the education marketplace, each of them armed with a $500 grant, thereby encouraging choice and competition.

This idea has a distinguished lineage. In the late 1960s, Theodore Sizer, then at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, proposed a "Poor Children's Bill of Rights" that would have supplied scholarships of $5,000 per child to the poorest half of children in the United States, for use at any accredited school, public or private. In 1992, while I was serving as secretary of education under President George H.W. Bush, the president asked Congress to appropriate a half billion dollars to create a pilot "GI Bill for Kids." The program would have awarded $1,000 scholarships to 500,000 children in states and cities that wanted to try the idea, but the Democrat-controlled Congress refused to enact it.

The most important point to make here is that most of this new scholarship money is likely to be used at the public schools that nine out of ten students now attend. I believe parents are likely either to give the money to their school to meet its general needs or to seek the school's advice on how best to spend the money to help their child. Surveys show that while many Americans are discouraged about the state of education generally, most parents support their own child's public school. Parents in affluent school districts regularly augment their schools' budgets with contributions for extra programs, particularly in the arts. Pell Grants for Kids would give children of low- and middle-income parents the same opportunity.

Pell Grants for Kids would provide more federal dollars for schools while also encouraging more local control—I mean more control by parents and teachers—over how that money is spent. Once parents make the decision about *where* the $500 will be spent, the principal and teachers in that school or program decide *how* it will be spent. For example, in a public middle school with 600 students, if two-thirds of the children are eligible for the grant, that's $200,000 in new federal dollars each year following those children to that school. This would be manna from heaven for schools, many of which engage in time-consuming charity sales to net $500 or $1,000 for needed programs and projects. Enterprising principals surely would design programs to attract parents' investment—perhaps an after-school program, an extra math teacher, or an intensive language course. And if they didn't, parents would have the option to spend the money on another accredited educational program that suited their child's needs, such as tutoring.

Aside from stimulating competition, these new federal funds would help to narrow the gaps in spending between wealthy and poor districts and make more real the promise that no child will be left behind. For example, in Bryan, Texas, property values average about $128,000 per student. Next door is College Station, home of Texas A&M University, where property values are $305,000 per student. As a result, College Station is able to collect far more in property taxes and its schools thus spend twice as much per stu-

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These new federal funds would help to narrow the gaps in spending between wealthy and poor districts.

dent as those in Bryan. Last year Herman Smith, superintendent of schools in Bryan, told me, "College Station is talking about *cuts* in programs and personnel that we could only dream of."

About 90 percent of Bryan's 13,500 students would be eligible for the $500 Pell Grants for Kids, putting more than $6 million in new federal dollars into the hands of Bryan parents. They could then provide more funds to Bryan's public schools, as is likely, or use the scholarship to help pay for enrichment programs or private school tuition. Bryan would still have fewer dollars to spend than College Station, but the gap would narrow.

Overcoming Objections

Let's consider some questions and criticisms that might accompany the Pell Grant for Kids proposal:

✦ *In a time of tight budgets, can the nation afford to offer $500 scholarships to 30 million schoolchildren?* If it were enacted today, Pell Grants for Kids would cost $15 billion a year. A number of measures could be taken to ease the burden. First, implement the program gradually, providing $500 scholarships only to kindergarten and 1st graders in the initial year. This would cost just $2 billion. Second, over the next several years, devote most of the new appropriations for K–12 education (not related to

Laboratories of Democracy

Four states have adopted policies resembling the Pell Grants for Kids proposal. Arizona, Illinois, Iowa, and Minnesota all provide reimbursement for educational expenses through tax credits or deductions. The Pell Grant for Kids would involve a direct grant to families, but economists regard tax benefits and grants as equivalent.

STATE	PROGRAM	DATE OF ENACTMENT
Arizona	Tax credit (nonrefundable) of up to $200 per individual or $250 per couple. Reimbursement for fees or donations to public schools for extracurricular activities or character education programs. Unused credits may be carried forward for five years.	1997
Illinois	Tax credit (nonrefundable) reimburses 25 percent of tuition, books, and lab fees in public, private, or home school. The first $250 paid is not eligible for the tax credit, and the credit may not exceed $500 per family.	1999
Iowa	Tax credit for 25 percent of tuition, textbooks, and extracurricular activities at public schools or nonprofit private schools. Tax credit may not exceed $250 per dependent child. Costs of religious materials are excluded.	1987
Minnesota	Tax deduction of up to $1,625 spent on elementary-school expenses and up to $2,500 for secondary-school expenses. Taxpayers with students in private, public, or home school qualify. Eligible expenses include tuition, tutoring, textbooks, transportation, academic summer camps, summer school, and up to $200 for a computer or educational software. Costs of extracurricular activities and religious materials are excluded.	1955; 1997 amendment established the tax credit
	Tax credit (refundable) for 75 percent of K-12 expenses. Tax credit may not exceed $1,000 per child or $2,000 per family. Taxpayers with students in private, public, or home school qualify; those with incomes greater than $37,500 ineligible. Eligible expenses and exclusions same as for tax deduction, except that tuition is also excluded.	

SOURCES: *Education Commission of the States; Arizona, Illinois, Iowa, and Minnesota statutes*

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children with disabilities) to Pell Grants for Kids. Done this way, it would not take many years to fully fund the scholarships while staying within a reasonable budget. For instance, if Congress had allocated two-thirds of all new federal spending (non-disability related) on K–12 education since 1992 to this program, $10 billion would have been available for scholarships this year—enough to provide full $500 scholarships to all middle- and low-income children in kindergarten through the 8th grade.

Or consider this: In just the first two years of the current administration, Congress appropriated $4.5 billion in new dollars for K–12 education (not counting another $3 billion more for children with disabilities). That $4.5 billion would have been enough to fully fund $500 scholarships for all nine million low- and middle-income children in kindergarten through 3rd grade.

✦ *Aren't K–12 schools and colleges so different that the Pell Grant analogy is invalid?* It is true that schools and colleges sometimes emphasize different public purposes. For example, schools are asked to teach children what it means to be an American, to inculcate moral values, and to make up for poor parenting. Universities have research and public service missions that schools don't share. But the core mission of both schools and colleges is the same: teaching and learning. Most high schools teach some college courses. Most community colleges teach some high-school students. That is why it is so odd that the way the federal government funds K–12 education is so different from the way it funds colleges.

✦ *Aren't you overlooking some real problems that colleges have?* No doubt universities have significant problems. Some college students don't pay back their loans. Some for-profit institutions are shams. Some courses are weird. Some tenured faculty members are worthless. In the context of rising tuition costs, there is too little interest in creating a less leisurely university calendar, in proposals such as requiring professors to work over the summer. Such abuses are the price of institutional autonomy and choice. Overall, however, American colleges and universities are by far the best in the world—and therefore useful models for how to improve our other educational institutions.

✦ *Can we trust middle- and low-income parents to spend $500 wisely on their child's education?* I would remind those who make this condescending argument that Congress currently appropriates $8 billion each year to provide childcare vouchers to 2.3 million low-income parents. These parents may use the voucher at any licensed center, public, private, or religious. Likewise, 9.5 million low-income students may spend their federal student aid dollars at any accredited college. If Congress trusts low-income citizens to choose childcare and higher education providers for themselves, why not trust them to spend $500 on K–12 education programming for their children? In addition, because of our experience using established accrediting agencies to monitor Pell Grants for colleges, it should be relatively easy to create a similar system to make sure that Pell Grants for Kids are not spent on fly-by-night operations.

"Enacting Pell Grants for Kids should be the next central thrust of federal efforts to improve the nation's schools," writes Senator Alexander, who served as secretary of education in the George H.W. Bush administration.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF OFFICE OF SENATOR LAMAR ALEXANDER

✦ *Will more federal funding mean more federal control over education?* Pell Grants for Kids would actually reduce federal control over education. The current funding process dictates how federal dollars are to be spent and imposes heavy regulations on local schools. Letting federal dollars follow children to the school of their parents' choice would put control back into the hands of parents and teachers.

✦ *Would Pell Grants for Kids violate the principle of separation of church and state?* Federal grants have followed students to parochial colleges since World War II and to parochial daycare centers since 1990.

✦ *Will giving individual schools so much autonomy leave some mired in mediocrity?* Autonomy need not mean a lack of accountability. The No Child Left Behind Act requires states to establish tough academic standards and to measure students' and schools' performance on an annual basis. With these accountability systems in place, the argument for choice is that much stronger. Parents will have the knowledge of school performance to make

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Letting federal dollars follow children to the school of their parents' choice would put control back into the hands of parents and teachers.

informed choices about where to spend their new federal dollars. For this reason, students who decide to use their $500 scholarships at private schools would still be required to participate in their state's testing program.

✦ *Why not let all Title I money follow children to the schools of their choice?* For now, I believe a gradual approach is warranted. The nation should begin by letting parents control how most, not all, of newly appropriated federal dollars for K–12 education are spent. Let's monitor parents' spending patterns and school performance for a while and then evaluate whether to expand the program.

✦ *But private school tuition costs far more than $500.* Correct. So those who worry that vouchers will hurt public schools should relax. But six hundred parents armed with $500 each can exercise $300,000 in consumer power at a public middle school. Five hundred dollars can also help pay for language lessons or remedial help. At Puente Learning Center in South Los Angeles, Sister Jennie Lechtenberg teaches students of all ages English and clerical skills at an average cost to the center of $500 per year.

Toward Better Schools

Of course by themselves Pell Grants for Kids would not create the best schools in the world. As David Gardner said, it took autonomy and high standards in addition to generous funding following students to schools of their choice to help create the finest university system in the world. To increase schools' autonomy, Congress should provide generous support to the charter school movement, offer waivers from federal rules to successful school districts, and use its oversight power to simplify federal laws and regulations. To help schools aspire to the excellence most colleges enjoy, Congress needs to give schools more flexibility in administering the mandates of No Child Left Behind. To make it easier for schools to pay teachers more for teaching well, just as colleges do, Congress should encourage the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and other efforts to reward outstanding teachers. These organizations, in turn, must make the measure of students' progress a key ingredient in a teacher's evaluation.

It is a mistake to expect that merely switching to the higher education model for funding is all Congress needs to do to help transform public schools. To help children arrive at school ready to learn, Congress should heed President Bush's challenge to strengthen Head Start by improving coordination, emphasizing cognitive skills, increasing accountability, and involving governors. So that state and local governments can remain financially sound enough to support good schools, Congress should keep its promise to end unfunded federal mandates. So that children can learn what it means to be an American, Congress should help states put the teaching of American history and civics back in its rightful place in school curricula.

Finally, no plan for better schools is complete without better parenting. In his research James Coleman found that, until a child is 14, parents are twice as important as school for the child's learning. Yet the United States has gone from a society that values the job of being a parent to one that has been waging a war on parents. Liberal divorce laws and the diminished importance of marriage, higher taxes, poor schools, trash on television, unsafe streets, uncontrolled illegal drugs, and inflexible work arrangements have all made it harder for parents raising children. No part of American society has paid a higher price for this than our schools. Giving every middle- and low-income child a $500 scholarship to help encourage choice within education is a start, but only a start, toward putting government and society squarely on the side of parents raising children.

Nonetheless, enacting Pell Grants for Kids should be the next central thrust of federal efforts to improve the nation's schools. For the past half century, the United States has actively supported the expansion and improvement of higher education through a generous funding system that encourages autonomy, choice, and competition. Our institutions of higher education have helped produce the research that has been responsible for creating half our new jobs since World War II. They have sculpted an educated leadership and citizenry that have made our democracy work and made it possible to defend our freedoms. It is past time to take the formula that has worked so well to help create the best colleges in the world and use it to help create the best schools for our children.

–Lamar Alexander, R-Tennessee, is a U.S. senator. He served as U.S. secretary of education from 1991 to 1993.

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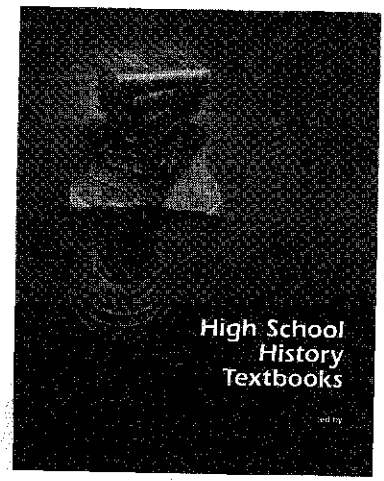

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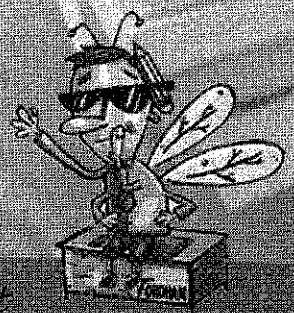

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the waiting game

Graduates of New Leaders for New Schools sport enviable resumés and a zeal for education reform. But will school districts give them the key to the principal's office?

by ALEXANDER RUSSO

ON THE FIRST Monday of the 2003–04 school year, Pablo Sierra was not where he hoped to be. Instead of greeting students as the new principal of a Chicago public school, Sierra was driving downtown for another round of meetings with district officials, trying to keep his spirits up and hoping that a position would open soon.

As a newly minted graduate of the widely heralded New Leaders for New Schools training program for aspiring principals, Sierra (and the developers of New Leaders) had understandably expected to find a slew of opportunities awaiting him. He thought that his prestigious MBA, private-sector experience, and nine years as a classroom teacher would distinguish him from more traditional applicants for the principalship. The intense yearlong "residency" program developed by New Leaders would make up for his lack of traditional administrative experience.

As of September, however, Sierra had all but given up on his first choice: being tapped to run a neighborhood school. He had started looking for a start-up or charter school opportunity and was hoping to avoid taking a job as an assistant principal. The silver lining is that Sierra was eventually able to secure a job as the assistant principal of a charter school and is now set to head a new charter school opening next year.

Sierra's situation was not unique among his New Leaders peers. Of his graduating class at the program's Chicago location, less than half had found jobs by late June. Those without preexisting connections to the community or to the school bureaucracy were struggling even to get interviews. Surprisingly, Sierra's private-sector training and experience were "not being perceived as positive," he said.

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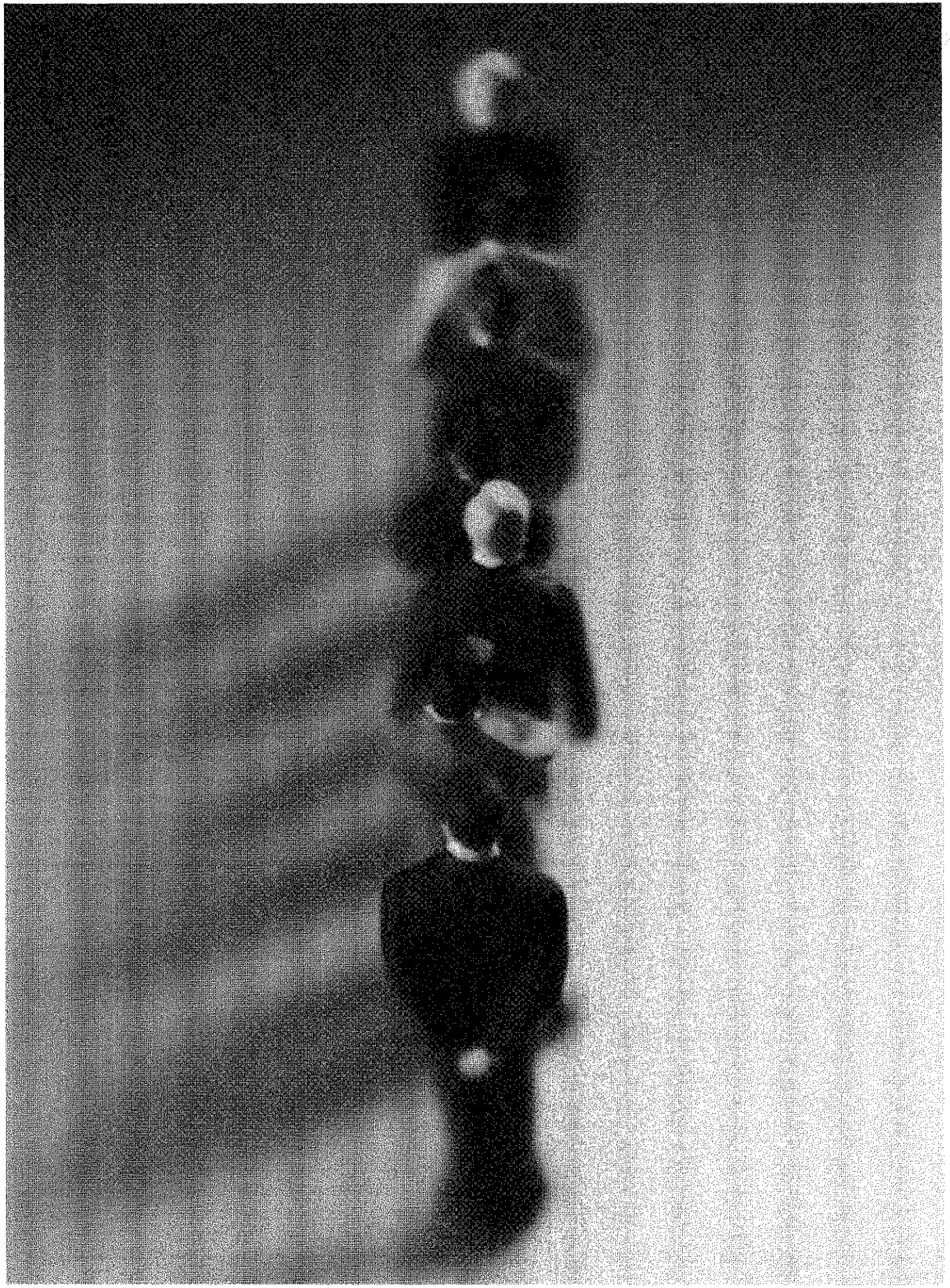

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The New Leaders are among the most confident, determined, and accomplished candidates you can imagine.

"All the positions are going to experienced [assistant principals]."

Since its founding four years ago, New Leaders has shown that there is no shortage of accomplished individuals like Sierra who want to be principals. The program continues to expand each year and has become a national voice for the reform of principal training. The remaining questions are whether school districts will let New Leaders run their own neighborhood schools—and are the New Leaders fellows really ready for the job?

New Blood

New Leaders for New Schools is the brainchild of a group of graduates from Harvard's business and education schools including CEO Jonathan Schnur, a former Clinton administration official. The New Leaders idea is to recruit accomplished individuals from both the private and public sectors, including public education, and provide them with the leadership training necessary to take on significant school management roles. "We're looking for the best people, wherever we can find them," says Schnur.

The motivation behind New Leaders was to supply new blood to cities that were reportedly facing shortages of qualified principals ready to turn around dysfunctional schools. New Leaders fellows would also receive the kind of leadership and management training that principals hired through traditional routes seldom enjoy. Each cohort of "new leaders" is chosen through a highly competitive application process. Those selected take courses during the summer, then spend a year in full-time "residency" at a school under the guidance of a mentor principal.

While securing principalships for the program's trainees has been challenging, finding accomplished aspirants has not. In 2003 the program received more than 1,000 completed applications for just 55 spots. Overall, roughly half the applications—and half of those accepted into the program—have come from nontraditional candidates, meaning that they were coming to the program from outside education or from another part of the country. Even those with traditional education backgrounds have flocked to New Leaders, seeking a program that is more hands-on and collegial than many of the principal-training programs based at schools of education.

As a result, the pool of New Leaders includes a concentration of individuals with backgrounds not often found among public school principals. For instance, Danny Kramer was a VISTA coordinator, a member of an Internet start-up, and a website designer for Oprah Winfrey. Drema Brown graduated from Yale Law School and ran a children's program in New Haven, Connecticut. And Cindy Moeller, a member of the current cohort of fellows, entered the program after earning her MBA at Northwestern and serving as a vice president for human resources at Baldwin Pianos. New Leaders usually requires its applicants to have two years of classroom experience in order to meet guidelines for certification as a public schools administrator. The program also works in partnership with local universities to secure formal certification for its graduates.

The current fellows range in age from their late 20s to their mid-50s. Two-thirds are African-American, Hispanic, or Asian-American, and two-thirds are women. Most important, they are among the most confident, determined, and accomplished school leadership candidates you can imagine.

What Shortages?

Despite their accomplishments and passion, New Leaders fellows have had a hard time breaking into traditional public schools, especially those fellows who lack contacts or extensive experience in education. It's not that New Leaders can't get work; nearly all of the New Leaders have secured education-related jobs. But just 5 of the first 15 graduates and just over half of the 32 graduates in 2003 found positions running schools of any type.

Of course a 50 percent placement rate for aspiring principals is no small accomplishment, and there has been undeniable progress in getting fellows hired at neighborhood schools. Patrick Baccellieri, a graduate of the program's first year in Chicago who had previously run a nonprofit, was hired to run a traditional school, as was second-year graduate Jarvis Sanford, a former diversity

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consultant for the Anti-Defamation League who holds an MBA and a Ph.D. Drema Brown is currently running a traditional public school in the Bronx, New York. Carleton Gordon, a longtime financial services executive, was named the principal at a tough school in Brooklyn in the fall of 2003. And after just a short time, some New Leaders have moved from assistant principal to the leadership spot in their schools.

However, these are the exceptions. Only 7 (out of 47) New Leaders have been hired to run traditional neighborhood schools. One problem is that, as it turns out, there isn't really that much of a numerical shortage of principals in the four cities—Chicago, New York, Washington, and the Bay Area—where New Leaders currently operates training programs. Principalships don't open up all that often. And when they do, these school districts receive tons of applications from insiders with more experience in education.

For instance, New York City may need to fill 150 open slots each year in a system with more than 1,200 schools. Program founder Schnur estimates that there are well over a thousand qualified candidates. Schnur says that there were only 60 to 70 genuine openings in Chicago this year, with about 65 applications for each position.

It is not just a numbers game though. The fact is that school district administrators and teachers have not wholly embraced the New Leaders concept. They tend to believe that the principal is also the instructional leader and should therefore have significant classroom experience. "Certainly, experience in other professions brings a perspective that could be a plus," says Deborah Lynch, president of the Chicago teacher union. "But so little teaching experience really makes me wonder if that's enough for a person to really get to know instructional improvement and school leadership."

Even the New Leaders candidates agree that this is somewhat of a disadvantage. "I might have wanted a few more years in the classroom from the curriculum side," says Kelly Wilson, a New Leaders graduate who holds an MBA and has a background in TV production. "We're being developed as curriculum leaders, but I probably needed more exposure to that."

The New Leaders training, while intense, will not make them curriculum experts. They get enough training and experience to talk the talk and are expected to learn along the way. And so, despite the widely acknowledged need for better-trained principals, reports of shortages, and waves of retirees, New Leaders candidates can end up seeming green. "Everybody just wants experience," says one Chicago school administrator who has observed several of the principal searches where New Leaders fellows were interviewed. "The bottom line is that schools want someone to run the school, not just theories."

School district administrators and teachers have not wholly embraced the New Leaders concept.

There are also cultural and stylistic conflicts that can complicate the relationship between nontraditional principals and career educators. Winning trust at a new school—what New Leaders tend to call "gaining entry"—is a key challenge, especially for those who have spent most of their careers outside of schools.

Danny Kramer, for example, had a few run-ins with other teachers during his residency year that a more experienced administrator might have avoided. "Danny started with us before the school year started and stayed with us the whole year," says Armstrong Elementary principal Arline Hersh. "He put his foot into it occasionally and learned that way," she says. "But that's part of the process, learning how to extricate yourself gracefully."

There are also those who, threatened and offended by the notion of programs like New Leaders, question the fundamental legitimacy of bringing in outsiders. "Why should we think someone would be an effective principal just because they were once a student?" asked Jill Levy, president of the 5,500-member Council of School Supervisors and Administrators in New York, last year. Her organization has vociferously opposed Chancellor Joel Klein's efforts to revamp principal training in New York City.

Conservative Hiring

New York is actually a bright spot in the New Leaders portfolio. Three quarters of the 2003 graduates of the New York program were selected to lead schools—a big increase from the previous year, when just two of eight became principals. Chicago

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Hiring a nontraditional principal may be more of a risk than hiring teachers or superintendents with nontraditional backgrounds.

has been more difficult to break into. In the program's first year, just one New Leaders graduate was tapped to run a school; two more have moved up to the top job since then. The share remains below 50 percent for the 2003 crop of New Leaders.

The disparity at least partly reflects the sheer size of the New York school district and thus the greater number of openings it has to fill. But the actual mechanisms for hiring principals in each city may provide a more likely explanation.

In New York it is largely up to district administrators to hire and assign principals. By contrast, in Chicago each individual local school council makes its own hiring decision. These councils, made up of parents, teachers, and community members, can be advised by the district. But the decision is, in the main, the council's to make.

Making the situation more difficult, roughly three out of four New Leaders in Chicago come from outside education—reflecting a priority expressed by the Chicago board of education, says Schnur.

The effects on the hiring process in Chicago are many. Local councils may not be familiar with the still-new New Leaders program, creating an enormous marketing challenge. With their strong ties to the community, local councils may also be more inclined to hire an inside person—an assistant principal, interim principal, or someone else from the community. And the principal contracts, set at terms of four years, make it very hard to remove someone if a decision goes awry.

"It is hard to get these people hired," says John Ayers, executive director of Leadership for Quality Education, a Chicago education reform group that has worked with New Leaders and supports its efforts. "Local school councils tend to be surprisingly conservative."

Bernard Lacour, a longtime school reformer who works with local school councils and consults with New Leaders on placement issues, believes that the obstacles thrown up by council dynamics and the predisposition for experience may be exacerbated by system politics, the advantages of incumbency, and fear among local councils that their candidates will be challenged by the board of education and their authority taken away from them.

Lacour notes that candidates who have not been administrators or who come from outside education frequently make it to the interview stage but rarely get hired or placed in the Chicago system. Only in rare cases is someone's newness and lack of strong affiliation with the school system a real advantage. Sometimes council members don't even know who has applied for the job, he says. "What we need is a process that is less daunting and procedural."

Heading Charters

Not surprisingly, one result is that a substantial number of New Leaders end up running charter schools, small schools, start-ups, or education organizations rather than traditional schools, especially in Chicago.

Take Kelly Wilson. She was the second New Leader to do her residency at a small but well-known school, Ariel Community Academy, located on the south side of Chicago. Her predecessor had been hired as an assistant principal at Ariel, but before the year was even over, Wilson became executive director of a school-based teacher-training program in Chicago. She was the second New Leader to hold this position.

Opinions vary about whether this is a good outcome for graduates of New Leaders. Wilson and others say that having effective leadership in urban school systems is important, regardless of where that leadership is located. But sending too many New Leaders into alternative schools could easily create the impression that the program is not well suited for mainstream schools or that the school system is not ready and willing to hire even the most capable candidates if they enter through alternative routes. After all, imagine what would have happened if Teach for America, the storied program that places talented college graduates into low-income schools, had sent many of its members into charter schools.

In fact, many New Leaders would rather work in a traditional environment. "I'd love to work in a traditional school," says Kramer, who is now serving as an assistant principal at Clinton Elementary School. "But that's a hard nut to crack, to get the [school councils] to interview you."

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Despite these difficulties, New Leaders already seems to be making an impact, both directly and indirectly. Evidence from the 2002–03 school year, while minimal, suggests that schools with New Leaders fellows at the helm outperformed other schools with first-year principals in reading and math improvements and in reduced percentages of failing students.

At the same time, there has been an enormous increase in attention toward new ways of recruiting, training, and placing principals, at least some of which can fairly be attributed indirectly to New Leaders. New Leaders has 55 residents in training this year, has expanded to Washington, D.C., and will be expanding to Memphis, Tennessee, this summer. Moreover, the organization was recently named one of the top 20 organizations that are changing the world by *Fast Company* magazine. In the meantime, other efforts to set up fast-track principal training programs dot the nation, and in-depth residency components are increasingly common. The New York, Chicago, and Boston school systems have all initiated or adapted school leadership programs that have key elements in common with New Leaders.

Befriending the System

Nevertheless, New Leaders will need to find more success in placing its graduates if it is to remain a viable model for improving the management of regular public schools. This presents no small challenge. In the end, hiring a nontraditional principal may be considered more of a risk than hiring teachers or superintendents with nontraditional backgrounds—two related trends that have swept the nation over the past decade.

For starters, compared with the principal, a teacher has an important but relatively small role in the overall well-being of a school. Principals and administrators may be more willing to "take a chance" with a single 4th-grade class than risk the health of an entire school on a candidate with little experience in education. Furthermore, with the proliferation of alternative certification and programs like Teach for America, the practice of hiring teachers without formal degrees in education or classroom experience is fairly well established. Teaching, unlike the principalship, is also often an entry-level job that requires little previous experience aside from student teaching. The only real difference between a Teach for America teacher and a regular teacher is the nature of their training.

Entering a role that involves managing professionals, like teachers, is tough in any field where a candidate lacks experience.

Similarly, the trend toward bringing in outsiders to run school districts is now at least a decade old. Superintendents with backgrounds in business, the military, or government are hired more for their forceful personalities and management skills than for their knowledge of instruction. They can arguably rely on the veteran educators within their systems to provide instructional leadership, while school principals need to be involved more directly in the process of upgrading the curriculum and monitoring the performance of teachers. By contrast, entering a role that involves directly managing professionals, like teachers, is tough to nearly impossible in any field where a candidate does not have significant experience. After all, how many newspaper editors did not do significant time in the reporting trenches? How many law firms' managing partners were not once first-year associates?

The lessons from the Chicago experience are clear and are already being implemented, according to Schnur. "We need to become more aggressive earlier in the year about helping nontraditional candidates access networks that can help them and in helping them understand the climate of the school system," he says. Last year, "We didn't invest enough time and energy into this part of the process early enough." This year the program has started networking earlier in the process and beefed up efforts to make sure that, when the time comes, New Leaders fellows are not just ready to take leadership positions, but are also welcomed by the school system.

–Alexander Russo is a freelance education writer. He is the editor of School Reform in Chicago: Lessons in Policy and Practice *(Harvard Education Press, 2004).*

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THE BRITISH experience

IT HAS BEEN 16 years since Britain's Conservative government under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher introduced the Education Reform Act. The law created a national curriculum for all state-supported schools as well as a national system of student testing and school inspections. The act was a determined attempt to diminish the power of local education authorities (which are similar to America's school districts) and to devolve resources and responsibility for meeting national

The Education Reform Act's efforts to establish national standards were swiftly hijacked by the "thought world" of education and by politicians more interested in votes than reform

standards to individual schools. And it has been seven years since the Labor Party and its prime minister, Tony Blair, came to power, pledging to raise standards with a blitz of initiatives and reforms. Labor's proposals included introducing national literacy and numeracy strategies in order to improve the learning of basic skills; establishing Education Action Zones that would encourage local businesses to work with schools; funding after-school homework groups; creating courses in citizenship; revising the national curriculum; and setting up a task

by CHRISTOPHER WOODHEAD

ILLUSTRATION BY JANET WOOLLEY

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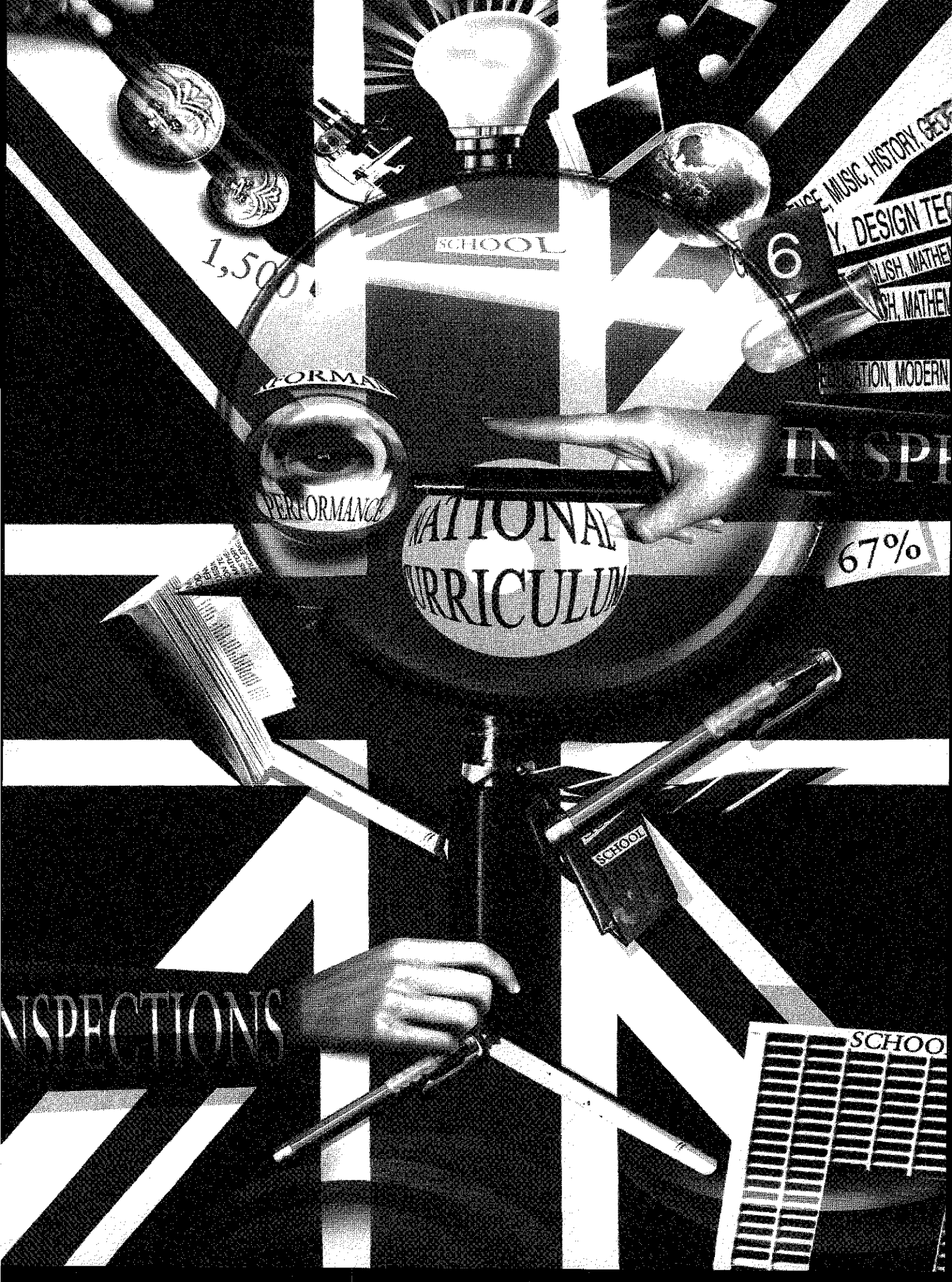

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The top-down imposition of politically inspired education reforms does not work.

force of leading educators to advise on new reforms.

What has this flurry of reform achieved? And what lessons, if any, can be drawn from this huge investment of political energy and public funds?

The answer to the first question is "not enough." A quarter of British 11-year-olds still leave primary school unable to read well enough to deal with the demands of the secondary-school curriculum. Results from the General Certificate of Secondary Education exam that students take at age 16 show improvement each year, but there is a general recognition that grade inflation makes the progress illusory. Only 43 percent of 16-year-olds pass the General Certificate exams in the core subjects of English, mathematics, and science. Thousands leave secondary school with no meaningful qualifications at all.

The lesson of this failure is simple: the top-down imposition of politically inspired education reforms does not work.

In the early 1990s, when I became chief executive of the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority, the body responsible for introducing the national curriculum into English schools and administering the tests in English, mathematics, and science that children were to take at ages 7, 11, and 14, I thought differently. I supported the idea of a national curriculum that defined core bodies of knowledge in English, mathematics, science, history, geography, art, music, physical education, information technology, design technology, and, in secondary schools, a modern foreign language. Such a curriculum would, I thought, challenge the child-centered orthodoxies and raise academic expectations.

National testing would give us crucial information on how individual students and schools were performing. At the time, in England, as in America, too many parents expected too little. They had no point of reference, no data on how their child's school was performing compared with other schools. More often than not, mediocrity went unchallenged. With testing, successful schools could be rewarded and the unsuccessful helped to improve. Failing that, they could be closed.

I also supported, and still do, what were known as "grant-maintained" schools. Grant-maintained schools, which are similar to charter schools in the United States, were established by the 1988 reforms. They are funded directly by the government and run independently of local education authorities. The thinking here was that the school should be responsible for its own destiny. Resources should not be wasted on local and national bureaucracies. It is the principal who makes the difference, not the distant bureaucrat. So let principals decide how the curriculum is to be organized and pupils taught. Give them the resources to do the job and hold them responsible for their school's performance. However, one of the very first things the Labor government did on coming to power in 1997 was to abolish grant-maintained schools. The policy was termed elitist and divisive because only a minority of schools, usually successful ones, had applied for and been given grant-maintained status. It therefore had to go.

I was also enthusiastic about the new school inspection system, especially after I was appointed chief inspector of schools in 1994. The new policy required that every school be inspected every four years. The idea was that expert inspectors would comment on standards of pupil achievement, the strength of the principal's leadership, the use of school resources, and the quality of what we called, rather quaintly, "social, moral, spiritual and cultural education." A report was to be published immediately following the inspection, and the failure of underperforming schools was to be made public.

In other words, from the beginning I supported nearly every change wrought by the Education Reform Act in 1988. That was before government officials and various education groups got into the act and diluted nearly every reform, rendering the changes impotent.

The National Curriculum

From day one, there was a battle over the content of the new national curriculum. Politicians felt that they had to involve the education "experts." Predictably, these experts fought strenuously for their pet theories, which were usually progressive. Skills were deemed more important than knowledge. Strenuous attempts were made to introduce "cross curricular themes" that, it was hoped, would undermine the focus on separate subject disciplines. In an open letter published in the *London Times Higher Education Supplement*, 576 English professors and lecturers complained that the government's "doctrinaire preoccupation" with grammar and spelling

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"betrayed a disastrously reductive, mechanistic understanding of English studies." They objected to making the study of Shakespeare compulsory in secondary schools and rejected as "dictatorial" a plan to "impose" a "canon of supposedly great works," including having all pupils read some Dickens and Wordsworth.

One of the results of all this lobbying has been the removal of the knowledge base from subjects like geography and history. The emphasis in geography is now on "sustainable development," field-work techniques, and the teaching of general skills (such as how to "collect, record and analyze evidence"). In history, 7-year-olds are encouraged "to see the diversity of human experience, and understand more about themselves as individuals and members of society." The fact that many students leave school at the age of 16 knowing next to nothing about the history of their own country does not appear to matter.

By all indications, officials in the Blair government support the progressivist tilt in the curriculum. "We need," said Blair appointee Estelle Morris just before resigning in 2002 as secretary of state for education, "a shift in understanding away from the old model of teaching as transmission of facts and figures towards one which captures the teacher's role as expert practitioners in advanced pedagogy." David Hopkins, who Morris appointed to the key role of head of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit at the Department for Education and Skills, believes that "when students begin to take ownership of the learning behavior, you see something quite transformational taking place inside the school, because then it is the students who actually control learning rather than the teacher."

The ideas about education and teaching that determine government policies and drive the spending of billions of pounds of public money are important. Yet the state relies on the "thought world" of the education establishment to define and implement its program of reform. The result is the waste of huge sums of money and the exhaustion and anger of teachers who want to get on with the job of teaching.

So how can a society establish a standards-based curriculum without having it hijacked by the education experts whose views are responsible for the mess we are trying to resolve? The key is a political will that remains resolute in the face of carefully orchestrated resistance and has the confidence to challenge the arguments of the professional lobby groups.

Public Education in the United Kingdom and the United States

UNITED KINGDOM	UNITED STATES
Public School Enrollment	
8.6 million (2001 school year)	47.7 million (2003 school year)
# of Public Schools (primary and secondary)	
26,400*	93,300
Public School Spending	
4.6% of GDP (FY 1999)	3.5% of GDP (FY 2000)
# of Governing Bodies	
150+ Local Education Authorities	14,890 school boards
% of High-School Graduates Entering College	
43%	63%
Performance on International Math & Science Assessments in 1970 & 1995	
Rank: 7th of 17 countries in 1970 17th of 38 countries in 1995	Rank: 9th of 17 countries in 1970 16th of 38 countries in 1995

** Includes independent (private) schools in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland*

SOURCES: *UK Department of Education and Skills; U.S. Department of Education; OECD; U.S. Department of Labor; Eric Hanushek, "The Importance of School Quality," in Paul Peterson, ed., Our Schools and Our Future (Hoover, 2003)*

Inflated Results

Then there are the tests and examinations that are meant to be a robust, objective measure of students' and schools' performance. The problem is the fact that the national government, which desires that the electorate view its reforms favorably, controls both the national curriculum tests that pupils take at the ages of 7, 11, and 14 and the public examinations that are taken at ages 16 (the General Certificate of Secondary Education exams meant to assess skills and knowledge in the traditional academic subjects) and 18 (the Advanced Level exams for students hoping to attend university). This control is denied, but the organization that holds direct responsibility for the administration of the tests and the maintenance of standards in public examinations (the

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Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, formerly the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority) has, as I know from my experience when I was its chief executive, a very fragile independence. Meetings with government officials are held regularly. Department of Education officials attend all board meetings. We knew exactly what the ministers wanted, and they knew exactly what we were doing.

Consequently, results from these tests and examinations appear to improve each year, but endemic grade inflation, maladministration, and, in my view, political interference have undermined public and professional confidence in the entire examination system.

For instance, in 2002, the scores 11-year-olds needed to pass the national curriculum tests in English and mathematics were reduced by 4 percent and 5 percent, respectively. Was this done, as the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority argues, because 2002's test was significantly harder than the previous year's? I very much doubt it. In fact, the public examinations have been diluted across the board. David Burghes, a professor of mathematics in Exeter University's education department, recently wrote, "It has become obvious that a [General Certificate of Secondary Education] tells you nothing. You can get a grade C in Mathematics (the pass mark) without being able to do long division and multiplication or anything to do with decimal fractions without a calculator."

> Endemic grade inflation, maladministration, and political interference have undermined confidence in the examination system.

A biology question that was on the 1979 examination for 16-year-olds turned up 16 years later as an Advanced Level question for 18-year-olds. In 1989, the mark needed to achieve a grade C in one mathematics examination for the General Certificate of Secondary Education was 48 percent. In 2000 it was 18 percent. Students can get four-fifths of the answers wrong and still pass. Moreover, university admissions tutors report escalating worries about the knowledge base of applicants for their courses. Cambridge University has extended the term needed to earn a mathematics degree from three years to four because the tutors found that today's students were simply not able to make enough progress in the time previously allocated to the degree.

It is hard, given such evidence, to have much, if any, confidence in England's system of tests and examinations. A recent survey of ordinary classroom teachers found that they also think the examinations have become easier. But the government and the teacher unions remain in denial. "We have every reason," a Qualifications and Curriculum Authority spokesman reassured the great British public last year, "to think improvements in grades are a consequence of hard work and better preparation of pupils and teachers."

Self-Inspection

Would the system of school inspections make up for the problems with the national curriculum and testing? At first the inspection system showed real promise. Of the 24,000 state-supported schools in England, 1,500 have failed their inspection since the system of inspections began in 1992. Many of these schools had been failing for years, yet no one had bothered to do anything. With the establishment of inspections, however, the trauma of public humiliation, coupled with a change in senior staff and some extra resources, led most failing schools to improve. Done well, the inspections provided school managers with invaluable information about how their school was performing. The inspections also provided politicians and their bureaucrats with the information they needed to formulate relevant policies and to target resources intelligently. More generally, the prospect of inspection concentrated a large number of minds that needed concentrating.

But of course the unions and the education establishment hated the whole thing. Why, they asked plaintively, did the government want "to pillory and demoralize" hard-working teachers? They compared school inspections to the Spanish Inquisition. And in the end they won. During the past four years, the inspection process has been softened gradually in response to teachers' criticism. Schools are now inspected less frequently, less extensively, and, some would say, less rigorously. In 2004 the idea is to make the inspections a check on the school's own self-evaluation, thus destroying the whole idea of an independent appraisal.

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Good Money Chasing Bad Ideas

My sense, seven years after the Labor Party took control, is that the wheel has more or less come full circle. The old socialist belief that problems can be solved by throwing money at them has replaced a commitment to real change. The secretary of state for education insists that the decision to spend more on education is dependent on the willingness of the profession to "modernize," but the truth is that billions of pounds have been spent with precious little to show for it.

For instance, 230 million pounds were wasted on a policy known as Education Action Zones that was meant to encourage partnerships between business and schools in deprived areas. It had no discernible effect on standards and has now been abandoned. A National College of School Leadership has been established with a budget of 60 million pounds a year. Does it have to send groups of prospective principals to China for no apparent reason? Should it really be encouraging schools to believe that it is better to teach "emotional literacy" than reading and writing? The current secretary of state for education, Charles Clarke, wants every secondary school to become a "specialist" school focusing on a particular subject, such as science, technology, business, or foreign languages. The fact that the inspectorate has not been able to find any link between specialist school status and improved examination standards is, apparently, irrelevant.

Perhaps the best example of the waste of public money is the scheme to introduce a system of performance pay for teachers. In theory, this is a sensible idea. Good schools and successful teachers ought to be rewarded for their success. But in practice it has been a disaster. The absurdity is that once teachers have received their "bonus," they will be paid that extra money for the rest of their professional life. There is no annual setting of targets, no review of performance, and no possibility, therefore, of the enhanced motivation that additional pay is meant to encourage. The government pretends that it has overseen a "radical modernization of the teaching profession." Hogwash. Of teachers who applied for the extra pay, 95 percent crossed the threshold. Our teachers are being paid more. End of story.

In the past few years, the belief that centralized initiatives coupled with massive new "investment" will solve the problems of state education has triumphed over the drive to open the performance of state schools to public scrutiny. The bureaucracies, local and national, have grown in size and power as the number of initiatives has multiplied. Many of the new initiatives are based on the educational ideas that created the problems in our schools, such as the drive to teach "thinking skills" in a knowledge vacuum.

The government pretends that it has overseen a "radical modernization of the teaching profession." Hogwash. Our teachers are being paid more. End of story.

What is the alternative? The way forward is to return to and extend the concept of the grant-maintained schools that Labor abolished in 1997. Principals should be allowed to run their schools according to their own professional judgment and the wishes and aspirations of parents. Teachers should not have to waste 25 percent of their working day on bureaucratic tasks that add nothing to their effectiveness in the classroom. Forty percent of every pound spent on state education should not be squandered on the bureaucracies that are responsible for the miseducation of so many children.

It does not have to be like this. The state does not have to micromanage what happens in each of its schools. We could trust parents more and politicians and their bureaucrats less. But there is little sign that the current government really wants to involve the private sector in the running of state education or to find ways, through vouchers or tax credits, of genuinely empowering parents. Neither does our Conservative Party seem to have the courage of what ought to be its natural convictions. Sooner or later, however, because the present situation is untenable, change will come. Taxpayers will realize that they are paying more for public services that have not improved. Parents will grow more restive as they fail to secure a place for their children in a decent school. The government of the day will have to respond.

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The notion of "local control" has an enduring resonance in American education, yet the law gives state officials the upper hand by RICHARD BRIFFAULT

In a December 2003 decision, a Colorado trial court judge invalidated the state's new school voucher program. The decision was unusual in that the court relied not on traditional separation-of-church-and-state concerns, but instead on a provision of the Colorado state constitution that vests control over public education in local school boards. The court held that by failing to give local school boards any "input whatsoever into the instruction to be offered by the private schools" that accepted voucher students, the state had violated the constitutional provision that grants local boards "control of instruction in the public schools of their respective districts."

The ruling in *Colorado Congress of Parents v. Owens*, which has already been appealed, illustrates the longstanding tension in American education law between two competing models of the relationship between states and local school boards. The dominant approach has treated school boards as legally subordinate to their states, recognizing that most state constitutions explicitly assign responsibility for and authority over public education to the state government. While the states' nearly unlimited authority has been repeatedly affirmed by the courts, there has been intermittent legal recognition of the de facto autonomy enjoyed by local school boards in the day-to-day operation and management of their schools. Moreover, as the Colorado decision indicates, courts have occasionally recognized—and even celebrated—the powerful tradition of local control in American education.

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However, the Colorado case is the rare example of local control's successfully trumping state action. Overall, the tradition of local control has not constrained the states' role in education. On the contrary, local-control arguments have been most successful in court when the states themselves have wielded them as a means of resisting new obligations, such as equalizing spending between wealthy and poor districts. In other words, local control is primarily a matter of state policy rather than a constraint imposed by federal or state constitutional law on the states' role in education. States assert the principle of local control when it is convenient for them to do so, without yielding much authority to local school boards.

"Arms of the State"

The roughly 15,000 local school districts in the United States account for more than one-sixth of all American local governments. Of these districts, more than 90 percent are legally and politically independent of their surrounding counties or municipalities; the vast majority are governed by elected boards. (However, a number of states have recently authorized the mayors of big cities, such as Cleveland and Detroit, to appoint some or all of the members of their school boards, while New York gave the mayor of New York City the power to appoint a commissioner of education to run the city's schools.) In some states, local school boards also enjoy fiscal independence, including the power to levy taxes. In most states, however, school boards are fiscally dependent on other local governments.

States assert the principle of local control when it is convenient for them to do so, without yielding much authority to local school boards.

The legal status of school boards flows from two key factors. First, school districts are local governments and thus, like all other local governments, are subordinate to their states. Second, unlike counties and municipalities, school districts have a single function—the provision of public education—that is considered a state responsibility. Virtually every state constitution requires the state legislature to provide for a system of free public education. The existence of such a mandate is an unusual departure in American constitutionalism—which has traditionally been focused on limiting government power, not creating obligations to provide a public service—and is a tribute to the central role of public education in American culture. Thus, as units specializing in public education, school districts are often seen as *agencies* of the state—sometimes, rhetorically, "arms of the state"—for the implementation of the state's education mandate.

The state interest in education affects the powers of local school boards significantly. First, there is far greater state oversight of school boards than of other local governments. State boards of education and state education agencies promulgate extensive regulations governing school board behavior and school district operations. There is no comparable state administrative officer or body—other than the legislature itself—with similar powers over counties, cities, or other localities. State legislatures also heavily regulate the school system, through laws dealing with school district organization, elections, and governance; education programs, instructional materials, and proficiency testing; attendance rules; the length of the school day and school year; teacher credentialing, tenure, and pensions; the construction and maintenance of school buildings; school district finances and budgets; school safety; parents' and students' rights and responsibilities; and virtually every other aspect of school operations and policy. By my count, 14 volumes of the California legislative code concern education.

Finally, the strong state interest in education means that local school boards tend to have relatively limited powers to initiate policies on their own. One recent study in Kansas found that school districts had to obtain express statutory authority to hire lobbyists; operate alternative schools; share guidance programs; enter into interdistrict agreements to share personnel or computer systems; pay dues to the Kansas Association of School Boards; educate military dependents; or obtain boiler, fire, auto, health, or student insurance. To be sure, other studies have found that courts have construed the implied powers of school districts broadly, particularly in recent years, permitting greater "freedom and experimentation" than the formal

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limitations of school board powers would suggest, including the ability to add to the state-prescribed curriculum and to supplement state-mandated materials. Yet while school boards' capacity to innovate may be greater in practice than it is in theory, they enjoy less autonomy than other local governments.

The rise of charter schools reflects the subordinate position of local school districts vis-à-vis state governments.

Hostile Takeovers

One of the clearest illustrations of states' power relative to school districts is the freedom they enjoy to restructure or displace locally elected school boards. For instance, the judiciary treated New York State's 1961 reorganization of the New York City Board of Education as akin to an internal restructuring of a branch of state government rather than an infringement on local autonomy. The legislature, at the request of the city's mayor, eliminated the board of education and authorized the mayor to appoint a new board from a list of nominees prepared by the legislature. When the ousted board members filed suit, claiming that the state's action violated the principle of home rule, the New York Court of Appeals—the state's highest court—sided with the state. The court argued that board of education members were "officers of an independent corporation separate and distinct from the city, created by the State for the purpose of carrying out a purely State function and are not city officers within the compass of the constitution's home rule provision." More recently, courts have upheld state laws ousting the independently elected school boards in Cleveland, Detroit, and Harrisburg, giving each city's mayor the power to appoint all or most of the new board's members.

These high-profile restructurings were initiated by local officials or resulted in the transfer of power to those local officials. To that extent, they may bolster local control even if they involve a loss of school board autonomy. But state courts have been just as deferential to state laws allowing the takeover of local districts by state appointees. As of 2002, a total of 24 states had adopted laws authorizing a state education agency to displace a school board and take over the operation of a school district in cases of protracted problems with academic performance, fiscal mismanagement, or corruption. In 15 states, state law permits a state agency to take over an individual school. The Education Commission of the States found that since the late 1980s there have been nearly 50 school district takeovers (some involving multiple state interventions in the same district) in 19 states. Courts have found these measures to be well within the state's prerogatives.

Diluted Local Authority

The rise of charter schools also reflects the subordinate position of local school districts and to some extent further weakens their position. In most states the creation of a charter school challenges a school district's control over the public schools within its borders. Just 12 states vest the authority to grant charter school applications solely in school districts. By contrast, in 23 states, many institutions can approve charter schools, such as the state board of education, universities, a specially designated state board for charter schools, or local school districts. In 26 states (including 10 of the 12 states above), the initial decision by a local school board to deny a charter school application may be appealed to the state board of education or another institution, thus curbing school districts' control over the approval of charters even where school districts are given a role.

State courts have uniformly rejected challenges to charter school-enabling legislation, relying on the plenary state power over public schools. In California an appellate court found that charter schools easily fell within the legislature's "sweeping and comprehensive powers in relation to our public schools." The charter schools were, like the school districts and county boards of education challenging their charters, creatures of the state "authorized to maintain" public schools. Similarly, the Utah Supreme Court rejected the claim brought by the state school boards association that the statute authorizing the state board of education to approve and supervise charter schools represented an unconstitutional expansion of the state board's authority into the area of local schools.

Courts have also been reluctant to entertain suits by school boards challenging decisions to grant particular charter school applications. A Pennsylvania court held that a school district lacked standing to contest the grant of a charter application, even though the school district had alleged that the new school would draw students (and thus state funds) away from the district.

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Great Power, Great Responsibility

Sometimes school boards can benefit from being subordinate to their states in the sense that states can be held responsible for the fiscal health of school districts. For instance, in the 1992 *Butt v. State of California* decision, the California Supreme Court held that the state was constitutionally required to bail out a local school district that decided to end the school year six weeks earlier than planned because of acute financial difficulties.

The state had resisted the bailout, claiming the district had received enough state support under California's equalized school funding system. The state contended that requiring additional state financial support would enable a local district to "indulge in fiscal irresponsibility without penalty." Moreover, the state argued that the bailout would be inconsistent with the principle of local control.

The California Supreme Court disagreed sharply. It found that the state had long departed from local control by taking an enormous role in school governance and decisionmaking, including setting standards for and overseeing local school district budgets. Nor would a bailout make fiscal mismanagement more likely since the state has authority to "further tighten budgetary oversight, impose prudent, nondiscriminatory conditions on emergency State aid, and authorize intervention by State education officials to stabilize the management of local districts whose imprudent policies have threatened their fiscal integrity." In any event, the state's "ultimate responsibility for equal operation of the common school system" meant that the "State is obliged to intervene when a local district's fiscal problems would otherwise deny its students basic educational equality."

The education clauses of state constitutions have also provided the legal foundation for the wave of court-ordered school funding equalization reforms over the past three decades. State courts have repeatedly held states responsible for ensuring that all students receive at least an adequate, though not necessarily equal, education. Such decisions have forced many states to take a stronger role in the funding and regulation of local schools. The legal theory underlying school finance reform is predicated to a significant degree on the principle that local school districts are essentially agencies of the states, charged with providing the education mandated by the state's constitution.

The Value of "Local Control"

While demonstrating the states' legal responsibility for public education, the school finance cases also illustrate the resonance of the local control principle. First, eight state supreme courts have cited the value of local control in upholding the states' reliance on local property taxes to fund the schools, notwithstanding the resulting inequalities in spending among districts. Second, even in the many cases where courts have sided with the plaintiffs and demanded financing reforms, the courts have typically ruled that individual local districts are free to raise and spend above the level they deem "adequate." As the Arizona Supreme Court observed, in the course of striking down the state's school financing system:

> Local control in these matters is an important part of our culture. Thus, school houses, school districts, and counties will not always be the same because some districts may either attach greater importance to education or have more wherewithal to fund it. Nothing in our constitution prohibits this. . . . Indeed, if citizens were not free to go above and beyond the state financed system to produce a school system that meets their needs, public education statewide would suffer.

While demonstrating the states' legal responsibility for public education, the school finance movement also illustrates the resonance of local control.

The principle of local control has also played a pivotal role in the U.S. Supreme Court's jurisprudence regarding school finance reform. In the 1972 decision in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, the Court accepted to a considerable degree the argument that the funding of schools primarily through local property taxes resulted in significant differences in school spending and quality from district to district. Nevertheless, the Court upheld Texas's school financing system because it grew out of and supported a system of local control.

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Local control is valuable, said the Court, because it facilitates "the greatest participation by those most directly concerned" with school decisionmaking. It also, the Court wrote, builds support for public schools, enables those communities that wish "to devote more money to the education" of their children to do so, and provides "opportunity for experimentation, innovation, and a healthy competition for educational excellence." The Court determined that local-based financing was constitutionally justified, notwithstanding the resulting inequalities, because the state could reasonably decide to promote local control in public education. Indeed, the state was not challenging local control but instead relied on it to deflect a constitutional claim.

The Supreme Court made an even more powerful departure from the "school-district-as-arm-of-the-state" model in *Milliken v. Bradley*. In that case, the Court rejected a lower court's order requiring interdistrict busing as a remedy for segregation in Detroit. The lower court had found that segregation in the Detroit schools could not be remedied without including suburban school districts in the busing program. In the lower court's view, Detroit and the suburban districts were merely different components of a single Michigan school system, so district boundaries could be ignored in developing a remedy.

The Supreme Court rejected the district court's assertion that the school district boundaries "are no more than arbitrary lines on a map." Instead, the Court argued, "the notion that school district lines may be casually ignored or treated as a mere administrative convenience is contrary to the history of public education in our country." The Court found that extending the busing remedy beyond the Detroit system would undermine the autonomy of the suburban school districts.

The four dissenting justices pointed to the considerable authority the state enjoyed over school districts, including the "wide-ranging powers to consolidate and merge school districts, even without the consent of the districts themselves or of the local citizenry." Indeed, as the dissenters noted, between 1964 and 1972 Michigan had winnowed the number of school districts statewide from 1,438 to 608. The prevailing view of the majority, however, was that the state's formal authority to consolidate school districts was irrelevant. Unless the state itself ordered a consolidation, the suburban school districts could rely on their independent existence to insulate themselves from Detroit's problems. The federal courts had to respect the existing school district boundary lines, even if that made impossible an effective remedy for segregation in the metropolitan area.

State Intervention, Local Opposition

State governments are typically successful in exercising the authority their state constitutions give them over public education. However, as the school finance cases demonstrate, states are perfectly willing to raise the principle of local control when it suits their interests. In these cases, local

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control has been asserted by the state defensively to relieve it from having to increase its school spending or take on unsought oversight responsibilities. In short, the local control argument functioned as a shield to sustain state policy, not as a sword to alter policy in the direction of more local control.

Only in a handful of cases have local school districts successfully used the idea of local control to resist state actions. Not coincidentally, these cases arose in Colorado and Wisconsin, two of the relative handful of states where the state constitution directly grants power over local schools to local school boards. The overwhelming majority of state constitutions make no mention whatsoever of school districts or local school boards.

For instance, in *Board of Education No. 1 in the City and County of Denver v. Booth*, the Denver school board challenged Colorado's Charter Schools Act, which grants local school boards the authority to approve or disapprove a charter application. The board asserted that the statute gives the state board of education more powers than the Colorado state constitution permits and infringes on the state constitution's provision that the local school board "shall have control of instruction in the public schools of their respective districts."

The Colorado charter statute enables aspirants whose applications are denied by local school boards to appeal to the state board of education. The state board can then force the district board to reconsider. If the district board again denies the application, the charter applicant may again appeal to the state board. If on the second appeal the state board finds that granting the charter is in the public interest, it may reverse and remand to the district board "with instructions to approve the charter applicant."

In the 1999 *Booth* decision, the Colorado Supreme Court rejected the Denver board's position, finding that the constitution's grant of "general supervision" over public education to the state board was broad enough to encompass the power to approve local charter schools. However, the local board's authority could not be entirely displaced. Rather, "as long as a school district exists, the local school board has undeniable constitutional authority," including "substantial discretion regarding the character of instruction that students will receive at the district's expense."

The Colorado court struck a compromise that would affirm the state board's authority as well as the local board's interest "in controlling instruction." The state board could order the local board to approve a charter application, but it could not require the local board to actually open a school or agree to all the terms of the charter applicant's proposal. Rather, the state board's order was treated merely as a directive to the local board to negotiate with the applicant concerning the "issues necessary to permit the applicant to open a charter school," including, in the Denver case, questions of the site of the school and per-pupil funding.

In the recent *Colorado Congress of Parents* decision, a Colorado district court took the legal protection of local school autonomy even further. The Colorado Opportunity Contract Pilot Program, enacted in 2003, established a voucher program for a limited number of low-income, low-achieving students who had attended schools in any of 11 poorly performing school districts. During the 2003–04 school year, enrollment in the voucher program was capped at 1 percent of the students in those school districts, rising to 6 percent in 2006–07. The program allowed parents to place their children in private schools at the district's expense.

Only in a handful of cases have local school districts successfully used the idea of local control to resist state actions.

Here the Colorado district court relied on the local control provision of the state constitution to strike down the voucher program altogether. The court emphasized the unusual nature of this provision and the role of local control in Colorado jurisprudence, noting that the Colorado Supreme Court's 1982 *Lujan* decision, rejecting a challenge to the state's school finance system, had relied on the value of local control. Unlike the Charter Schools Act upheld in *Booth*, which provided for a mix of state and local powers, the voucher program gave the local school board, in the court's words, "no substantial discretion over the educational program embodied in the voucher program," thus violating the state constitution.

It remains to be seen how this ruling will fare on appeal. One could reasonably argue that requiring school districts to provide some financial support to students attending private school does not directly interfere with the state constitution's mandate that local school boards have control over "*instruction in* the public schools" (emphasis added). But

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however the case is resolved, it serves as an important reminder of the importance of state-specific constitutional language and precedents, the considerable degree of variation in legal rules in our 50-state federal system, and the continuing power of the local control idea in education law.

Conclusion

Several recent developments have raised new questions about both the status of local school boards and the legal significance of the local control principle. For instance, court-ordered school finance reforms—as well as financing reforms undertaken to forestall litigation—have increased the state's share of education funding in many states. Such reforms have often been accompanied by greater state control over the distribution of financial resources and the use of state dollars. Moreover, courts in some states—such as those in New Jersey, West Virginia, and Kentucky—have required those states not only to increase aid to poorer school districts, but also to spell out the content of the education required by the state's constitution, to better monitor local school district performance, and to intervene when local school districts have failed to attain state education goals.

States have also become more involved in shaping the curriculum and in setting standards for graduation and teacher certification through the standards and accountability movement. Some have extended the school day or the school year or even set minimum homework requirements. The federal No Child Left Behind Act accelerates these trends by exerting a strong degree of federal authority over public education. The act burdens the states as well as local districts, imposing obligations to develop academic standards, test all students annually in grades 3 through 8, hire "highly qualified" teachers in core subjects, and reconstitute persistently failing schools in order to remain eligible for federal aid.

Indeed, other changes have involved shifts in power at the local level or even decentralization below the school district level, rather than greater control by the state (or the federal government). As noted, in a number of large cities, the mayor has effectively displaced the independent school board. Some states, like Kentucky, have adopted site-based management programs that transfer power from school districts to individual school councils. In addition, many states have provided for charter schools, which operate with considerable independence from—and often in conflict with—local school districts. These developments reflect the continuing power of the local control idea even as they undermine the position of independent school boards. Indeed, these decentralizing moves may be as great a challenge to school boards as centralization. Not only do they create competing local school authorities, but they also open alternative opportunities for the participation in school governance that the courts have proclaimed to be the normative value at the core of local autonomy.

The Colorado district court relied on the local control provision of the state constitution to strike down the voucher program altogether.

Taken together, these recent developments confirm that public education is an area of virtually complete state power (although now subject to greater federal intervention) that can be reshaped by state legislatures in either a centralizing or decentralizing direction or in both directions at once. But without changing the theory of state-local relations in education, these developments may be altering the practice. If so, this could resolve some of the tension between the formal law of state control and the de facto autonomy of local school districts by aligning practice with the formal legal theory of state power.

Yet it is unlikely that the political and legal debate over local control will end any time soon. The call for local control reflects many deep-seated concerns—the public's desire to participate in and influence decisions on a vital public matter; the role of local tax dollars in financing public education; the impact of local schools on local communities; the interest in taking diverse local preferences and circumstances into account in educational programs; and the possibilities for experimentation and innovation, to name a few. Even as the state- and federal-led accountability movement presents new challenges to local control, the political, economic, and educational arguments for local control are also likely to continue to enjoy support. As a result, the legal significance of the local control idea, much like the legal status of school boards themselves, is likely to be contested for some time to come.

–Richard Briffault is vice dean and professor of legislation at the Columbia University School of Law.

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Competition passes the test

Still more evidence from Florida that public schools improve when threatened with the loss of students and money

by JAY P. GREENE & MARCUS A. WINTERS

Do public schools respond to competition from private schools by improving the quality of instruction? This is one of the key questions in the voucher debate. Advocates of vouchers believe that public schools facing the threat of losing students and funding to private schools will take the measures necessary to raise student performance. Opponents worry that vouchers will actually leave public schools worse off by draining them of funds and encouraging the best students and the most involved parents to flee a failing school.

Florida's A+ program affords a unique opportunity to test these competing predictions. The A+ program offers all the students in schools that chronically fail the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) the opportunity to use a voucher to transfer to a private school. Schools face the threat of vouchers only if they are failing. They can remove the threat by improving their test scores. Comparing the performance of schools that were threatened with vouchers and the performance of those that faced no such threat gives a measure of how public schools respond to competition.

The A+ Program

All public school students in Florida enrolled in grades 3 through 10 take FCAT exams in math, reading, and writing. Test results have consequences for both students and schools. Students must pass the reading portion of the FCAT in order to be promoted to 4th grade, and they must pass the 10th-grade test to graduate. In addition, all Florida schools are graded from A to F based on the share of their student bodies that scores at high levels on the FCAT and experiences gains in their test scores from year to year.

A school's grade is lowered a level if less than half of its worst students (those in the bottom 25 percent at the school) make a year's worth of learning gains. In order to receive a grade, schools must test at least 90 percent of their students; otherwise, they receive an Incomplete and, after an investigation, the state commissioner of education assigns a grade to the school.

Schools that receive a grade of F twice during any four-year period are deemed chronically failing. Their students then become eligible to receive vouchers, called opportunity scholarships, which they can use at another public school or at a private school. The vouchers are worth the lesser of per-pupil spending in the public schools or the cost of attending the chosen private school.

Schools can take themselves off the chronically failing list by earning higher grades in future years. However, students who use vouchers to attend private schools can keep their vouchers until either they return to a public school or the grade levels offered by the private school run out. For example, if a student uses a voucher to attend 6th grade at a K–8 private school and the failing public school manages to turn things around the next year, the student may keep his voucher until he completes the 8th grade. Thereafter, if his family wants to

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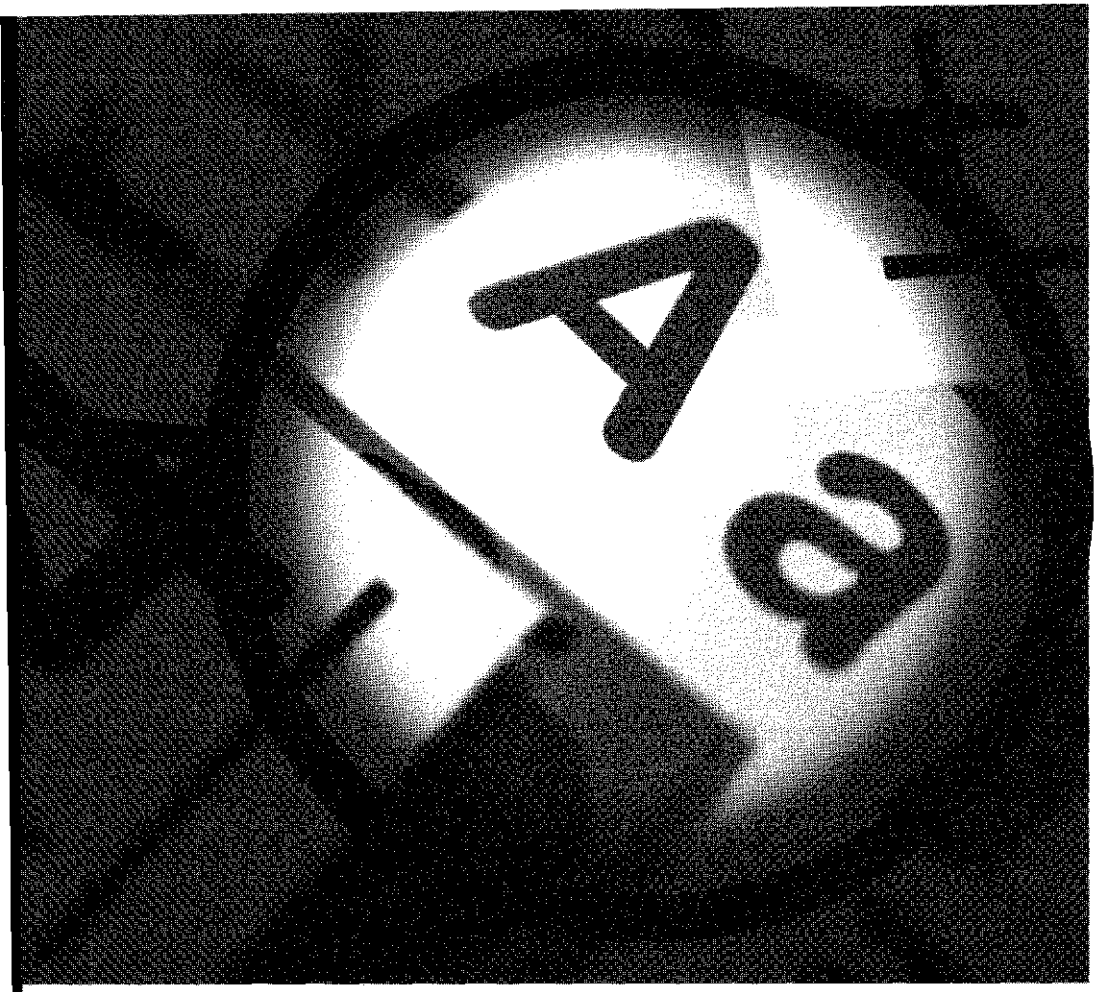

keep him in private school it must do so at its own expense.

Entering the 2002–03 administration of the FCAT, the focus of this study, 129 schools had received at least one F. Students in ten schools had become eligible for vouchers since the grading of schools began during the 1998–99 school year.

Florida does offer failing schools special funding that may temper any financial loss they suffer from students' choosing to transfer into private schools. The lowest-performing schools are given priority when applying for certain grants, and the state has earmarked funds to recruit teachers to work in schools that received D and F grades. However, since such funds are temporary solutions, they do not dramatically reduce the financial incentive for failing schools to remove themselves from voucher competition by improving their performance on the FCAT.

Five Categories of Schools

To analyze the program's impact on public schools, we collected school-level test scores on the 2001–02 and 2002–03 administrations of the FCAT and the Stanford-9, a national norm-referenced test that is given to all Florida public school students around the same time as the FCAT. The results from the Stanford-9 are particularly useful for our analysis. Schools are not held accountable for their students' performance on the Stanford-9. As a result, they have little incentive to manipulate the results by "teaching to the test" or through outright cheating. Thus, if gains are witnessed on both the FCAT and the Stanford-9, we can be reasonably confident that the gains reflect genuine improvements in student learning.

Florida's system of school grades and sanctions gives schools differing incentives. We thus separated schools into five categories based on their grades and the degree of actual or potential competition they faced from vouchers. We then compared the performance of the schools in these categories with the performance of the rest of Florida's public schools, looking at each category's change in FCAT and Stanford-9 scores from the 2001–02 school year to 2002–03. The five categories are:

✦ *Schools Eligible for Vouchers.* These schools have received at least two Fs since grades were first given in 1998–99 and have been deemed chronically failing by the state. Students at these schools have already been offered vouchers to attend private schools. Thus voucher-eligible schools are currently competing against private schools in the market for students. This is the group with the greatest incentive to improve and also the greatest likelihood of being harmed by vouchers if vouchers are in fact harmful.

Our study includes nine voucher-eligible schools. During the 2001–02 administration of the Stanford-9 (which was administered at about the same time as the FCAT test used to assign these schools' last grade), the students in these schools scored in the 25th percentile nationwide in reading and the 32nd percentile nationwide in math. The schools serve largely poor and minority student populations; 88 percent of their students are enrolled in the federal lunch program, 18 percent speak limited English, and only 1 percent are white.

✦ *Schools Facing the Threat of Vouchers.* These schools received one F during the three school years before the 2002–03 administration of the FCAT; one more F during the 2002–03 administration and their students would have been offered vouchers. They therefore had an incentive to improve in order to ward off the voucher threat. Our study includes 50 voucher-threatened schools, whose test scores and demographics closely resembled those of the voucher-eligible schools.

✦ *Always "D" Schools.* These schools have never received any grade other than D. Thus always-D schools are not voucher threatened, but they face the prospect of becoming so. Here it is important to note again that a school's grades are based not on its overall average scale score but rather on the percentage

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of students meeting levels of proficiency and the percentage of students making adequate gains on the tests. As a result, many always-D schools have similar or even lower test scores than F schools but have still managed to avoid receiving a failing grade.

The relatively low initial test scores and disadvantaged student populations of the 63 always-D schools in our analysis make them an attractive group to compare with the voucher-eligible and voucher-threatened schools. Since the three groups of schools are similar in their observable characteristics, such as the student body's ethnic makeup, and most likely in other characteristics as well, the only major difference between the always-D schools and the other two groups is the competition they face from vouchers. Comparing these three groups thus provides one way of isolating the influence of voucher competition.

✦ *Sometimes "D" Schools.* These schools have received at least one grade higher than D and have never received an F. The 507 sometimes-D schools do not face the imminent prospect of having to compete for students. Like always-D schools, many sometimes-D schools have test scores similar to or even lower than F schools though they have never received a failing grade. Because they face no competition from vouchers and have lower chances of receiving an F grade, sometimes-D schools are expected to make less improvement than the voucher-eligible, voucher-threatened, and always-D schools.

✦ *Formerly Threatened Schools.* These schools earned an F in the first year of grading, 1998–99, but have not received an F since. Thus they once faced the prospect of vouchers but no longer do because they have survived the four-year time period without receiving another F. Analyzing this group clarifies whether schools continue to improve relative to the rest of the public schools in Florida once the threat of vouchers disappears. It also tests whether the stigma of receiving an F, rather than the threat of vouchers, is what motivates schools to improve.

We compared the change in test-score performance for each of these groups relative to the rest of Florida public schools between the 2001–02 and 2002–03 administrations of the FCAT and the Stanford-9. Our method was to follow cohorts of students in grades 3 through 10 and calculate the schoolwide change in test scores. For example, we subtracted a school's 3rd-grade reading score on the 2001–02 FCAT from its 4th-grade reading score on the 2002–03 FCAT to get the change in scores for 4th graders at that school. Following cohorts measures the performance of roughly the same students on the test over time. We then averaged the change in test scores for each cohort in the school on each test and subject. This gave us a single cohort change for each school in Florida.

The changes in performance reported below for each group of schools have all been adjusted to take into account any changes between 2001–02 and 2002–03 in schools' demographic characteristics, such as the share of students participating in the federal school lunch program and the ethnic breakdown of the student body. Unfortunately, we were not able to control for changes in the number of students who spoke limited English or in the school's operating cost per pupil, because at the time of the study such information was available only up to the 2001–02 school year. We instead controlled only for the percentage of students who spoke limited English and the level of spending per pupil in 2001–02.

The inability to control for changes in spending may seem particularly troublesome. However, a similar analysis of the A+ program in a previous year found that taking into account changes in spending had no effect on the results. Furthermore, if any relative improvements made by schools competing with vouchers were the result of school districts' diverting funds to these schools, this could be seen as part of the voucher effect.

Results

Between the 2001–02 and 2002–03 administrations of the FCAT, voucher-eligible schools made the largest gain among the five categories of schools. In mathematics they improved by 15.1 scale-score points more than the rest of Florida's public schools (see Figure 1). (Results on the FCAT are reported as the cohort change in mean scale score on a scale from 100 to 500. The median school in Florida had a mean scale score of 291 on the reading test and 300 on the math test. Schools at the 5th percentile of schools in Florida had a reading scale score of 243 and a math scale score of 247, while the 95th percentile school had a reading score of 327 and a math score of 328.) On the Stanford-9 math test, voucher-eligible schools achieved gains that were 5.9 percentile points greater than the year-to-year gains achieved by other Florida public schools (see Figure 2). Results on the Stanford-9 are reported as the cohort change in national percentile rank.

Voucher-threatened schools made the next highest relative gains: 9.2 scale-score points on the math FCAT and 3.5 percentile points on the Stanford-9 in math. Each of these results is statistically significant at a very high level, meaning that we can be highly confident that the test-score gains made by schools facing the actuality or prospect of voucher competition were larger than the gains made by other public schools. As hypothesized, actual voucher competition produced the largest improvements in test scores, while the prospect of facing voucher competition produced somewhat smaller gains.

The results for the always-D and sometimes-D schools were also consistent with our hypotheses. Always-D schools, which, faced with the real danger of receiving their first F, had some incentive to improve, made a relative gain of 4.3 scale-score points on the math FCAT and 1.3 percentile points on the Stanford-9 math test. The sometimes-D

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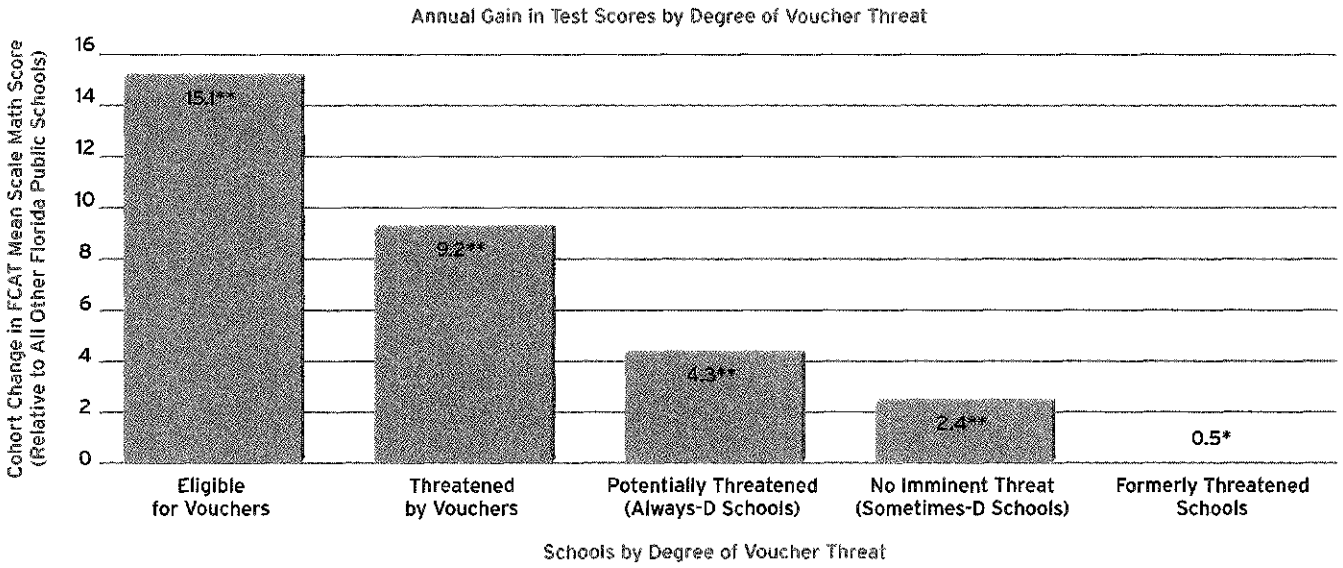
Students Win When Schools Compete (Figure 1)

Gains in test scores were 15 points higher among those schools whose students were eligible for vouchers than the gains among the rest of Florida's public schools. Schools whose students were on the verge of becoming eligible also made greater gains.

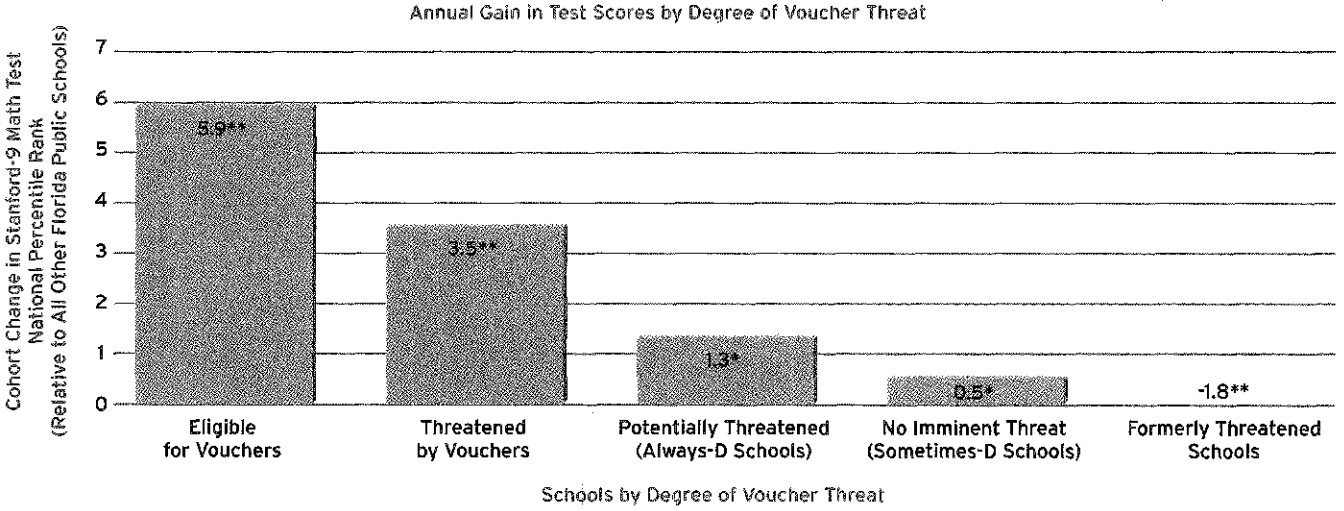


* Result statistically insignificant.
** Result significant at the .01 level.

SOURCE: Authors

Genuine Learning (Figure 2)

The same pattern—of greater gains among schools facing competition or the threat thereof—was witnessed on the national Stanford-9 exam, confirming that the gains reflect genuine improvements in learning rather than "teaching to the test" or cheating. The gains among schools whose students were eligible for vouchers were enough to erase almost one-fifth of the gap between their average score in the 2001–02 school year and the average score of all other Florida public schools.



* Result significant at the .05 level
** Result significant at the .01 level
Note: Gains between 2001-02 and 2002-03 school years. Results account for the level of school spending, the proportion of students speaking limited English, and for changes in students' other demographic characteristics.

SOURCE: Authors

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Closing the Gap

Further confirmation that the threat of vouchers caused public schools to improve their performance on Florida's accountability test by RAJASHRI CHAKRABARTI

Editor's note: In an independent analysis employing different techniques that allowed her to track trends over time, Rajashri Chakrabarti examined the performance of schools facing the threat of vouchers during the three years after Florida introduced its A+ program. Her findings, reported below, mirror those of Jay Greene and Marcus Winters, who analyzed the effect of the voucher threat for the 2002–03 school year.

Florida's A+ program provides a unique opportunity to evaluate the effect of vouchers on public school performance. Public schools that received an F grade during the 1998–99 school year were directly exposed to the threat of vouchers if they did not improve their test scores. Schools that received a D grade that same year faced no such direct threat. To analyze the effect of the voucher threat, I compared changes in the performance of F schools with the change among D schools from the 1998–99 school year through the 2001–02 school year.

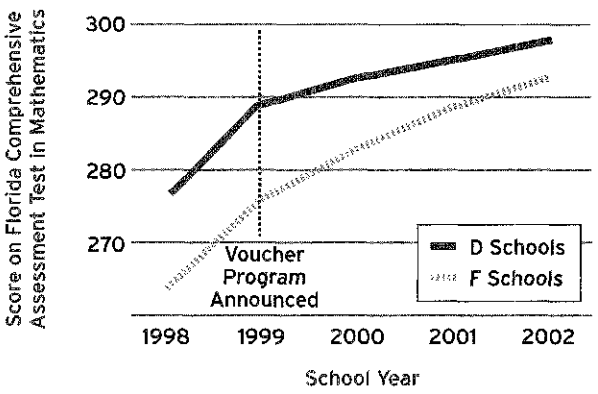
Schools that were originally given a grade of F in 1999 made greater performance gains than the D schools on each of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests (in math, reading, and writing) and in each of the three school years. (See accompanying figure for the results in math.) I also found that F schools made greater gains than a larger group of schools that were given a grade of C in 1998–99. D schools also made greater gains than C schools, perhaps reflecting the fact that D schools were not far from earning a grade of F and thereby facing the threat of vouchers.

These improvements did not reflect changes in the observable characteristics of the schools' student bodies or in the schools' levels of spending. Nor can the differences in gains be attributed to performance trends in the different groups of schools before the establishment of the program. Nor do the differences reflect the fact that F schools, being low performers, had more room for improvement.

Could these improvements simply reflect the stigma of being identified publicly as a low-performing school? Tellingly, I did not observe similar improvements among low-performing schools under the state's old accountability system, which rated schools based on their performance but did not impose the threat of vouchers. Beginning in 1997, Florida schools were assigned a rating of 1 to 4 on the basis of their performance. Schools placed in group 1 (the lowest-performing set) did not improve relative to schools in group 2 or group 3. In short, there is strong evidence that F schools in Florida responded to the threat of vouchers.

–Rajashri Chakrabarti is a doctoral candidate in economics at Cornell University. These results are from her paper "Impact of Voucher Design on Public School Performance: Evidence from Florida and Milwaukee Voucher Programs."

Performance of "D" and "F" Schools Under Florida's A+ Program



Note: Scores represent averages for all schools in each group after adjusting for changes in student characteristics and per-pupil spending and weighted by the number of test-takers.

SOURCE: Author

schools experienced year-to-year changes in FCAT math scores that were only 2.4 points higher than all other Florida public schools, significantly less than the gains in both voucher-eligible and voucher-threatened schools. Their improvement relative to all public schools on the Stanford-9 was less than a percentile point. Formerly threatened schools saw no improvement in their math scores relative to all public schools.

The patterns were similar in reading, though the relative gains made by schools facing voucher competition were smaller and sometimes statistically insignificant. Overall on the FCAT reading test, voucher-eligible schools gained 5.2 points more than other schools gained. However, this gain fell barely short of a conventional standard for statistical significance, likely due to the very small number of schools in this category (only nine). Voucher-eligible schools also made a statistically insignificant relative gain of 2.2 percentile points on the Stanford-9.

Voucher-threatened schools actually made the greatest gains on the FCAT reading test: 6.1 points. Their relative gain on the Stanford-9 was a statistically significant 1.7 percentile points.

Always-D schools made no statistically significant gains on the FCAT or Stanford-9 reading tests, while sometimes-D schools experienced a decrease of 1.1 points on the FCAT and no significant change on the Stanford-9 reading test. We also found a relative loss of 3.8 points for formerly threatened schools on the FCAT and a relative loss of 1.6 percentile points on the Stanford-9 (both results were statistically significant).

Overall, the schools facing either the prospect or the reality of vouchers made substantial gains compared with the results achieved by the rest of Florida's public schools. They also made strong gains relative to those earned by schools serving similar student populations, which had nonetheless avoided receiving an F.

The smaller gains achieved by always-D and sometimes-

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D schools compared with the performance of voucher-eligible and voucher-threatened schools, despite the similar characteristics of all these schools, strengthen our confidence that voucher competition is the cause of the improvements. Always-D schools, in particular, are very similar to voucher-eligible and voucher-threatened schools in their initial test scores, student populations, and resources, as well as other unobserved factors for which we could not adjust the data. Since it is essentially by chance that always-D schools do not receive an F, the comparison approximates a randomized experiment. Yet the schools that faced voucher competition experienced much larger increases in test scores.

Moreover, the similarity of our findings on the Stanford-9 and FCAT math tests suggests that the gains being made by schools facing voucher competition are the result of real learning and not simply manipulations of the state's high-stakes testing system (see Figure 2). If schools facing voucher competition were only appearing to improve by somehow manipulating Florida's high-stakes testing system, we would not have seen a corresponding improvement on another test that no one had incentives to manipulate.

Other Possible Explanations

Could the gains witnessed among voucher-eligible and voucher-threatened schools actually be the product of some influence other than their being forced to compete against private schools?

Let's first consider the possibility that it was the stigma of being labeled a failure, rather than the competitive incentives introduced by vouchers, that spurred improvement among F schools, as several researchers have suggested. If this were the case, we would expect to see similar gains among formerly threatened schools, which have also received at least one failing grade. Quite the contrary, however: formerly threatened schools made no gains in math and experienced losses in reading. In other words, formerly threatened schools still had the stigma of an F grade, but once the threat of vouchers was removed, they actually lost ground (see Figure 2).

Nonetheless, it is possible that the stigma of the F grade fades over time. In that event, schools that received an F in 1999 might no longer feel the stigma in 2003. But although the voucher-eligible and voucher-threatened school categories include some schools that received their most recent F in 2000, those categories experienced gains. We find it implausible that the stigma effect exists for only three years and then suddenly disappears. The more compelling explanation is that the actuality or prospect of voucher competition provides incentives for schools to improve, an effect that disappears when the four-year window expires.

Another potential explanation for the exceptional gains made by schools facing voucher competition is that their extremely low initial scores are affected by a statistical tendency called "regression to the mean." Schools that report very high and very low scores may report future scores that come closer to the average for the whole population. This tendency is created by nonrandom error in the test scores, which can be especially troublesome when scores are "bumping" against the top or the bottom of the test-score scale. For instance, if a school earns a score of 2 on a scale from 0 to 100, it is hard for students to do worse by chance but easier for them to do better by chance. Schools that are near the bottom of the scale are likely to improve, even if only by statistical fluke.

To test for this possibility, we compared the gains made by F schools with the performance of an even smaller subset of schools whose 2002 test scores were similar but had never received an F (which we termed low-performing non-F schools). If there were no difference between the gains experienced by F schools and those among low-performing non-F schools, we might worry that regression to the mean was driving our results.

In mathematics, the gains made by voucher-eligible and voucher-threatened schools relative to low-performing non-F schools on both the FCAT and the Stanford-9 were nearly as large as their gains relative to all other schools in the state. Thus in math there seems to be no effect from regression to the mean. In reading, however, we found no difference in the test-score gains achieved by F schools and low-performing non-F schools, suggesting that regression to the mean could be influencing our results in reading.

Even so, it seems unlikely that regression to the mean is the entire story, even in reading. The very fact that fewer schools were included in this section of the analysis made it less likely that significant differences would emerge. Moreover, the low-performing non-F schools actually had average test scores that were *lower* than those among the F schools. These schools also clearly faced pressure to improve in order to avoid the voucher threat, even if that threat was less immediate. Many of the schools in the low-performing category were also in either the always-D or sometimes-D categories, which were shown above to have made gains relative to all Florida public schools—probably due to the likelihood that they would receive an F if they did not improve.

Having largely ruled out these other explanations, we are left with the conclusion that the gains witnessed among low-performing schools are the result of the competitive pressures introduced by school vouchers. Moreover, the similarity of our findings on both the high-stakes FCAT and the low-stakes Stanford-9 indicates that the gains reflect genuine improvements in learning. In the absence of student-level information, results must remain tentative. Nonetheless, this study yields solid evidence that public schools will react positively to being forced to compete with private schools for students and the dollars they carry.

–Jay P. Greene is a senior fellow and Marcus A. Winters a research associate at the Manhattan Institute.

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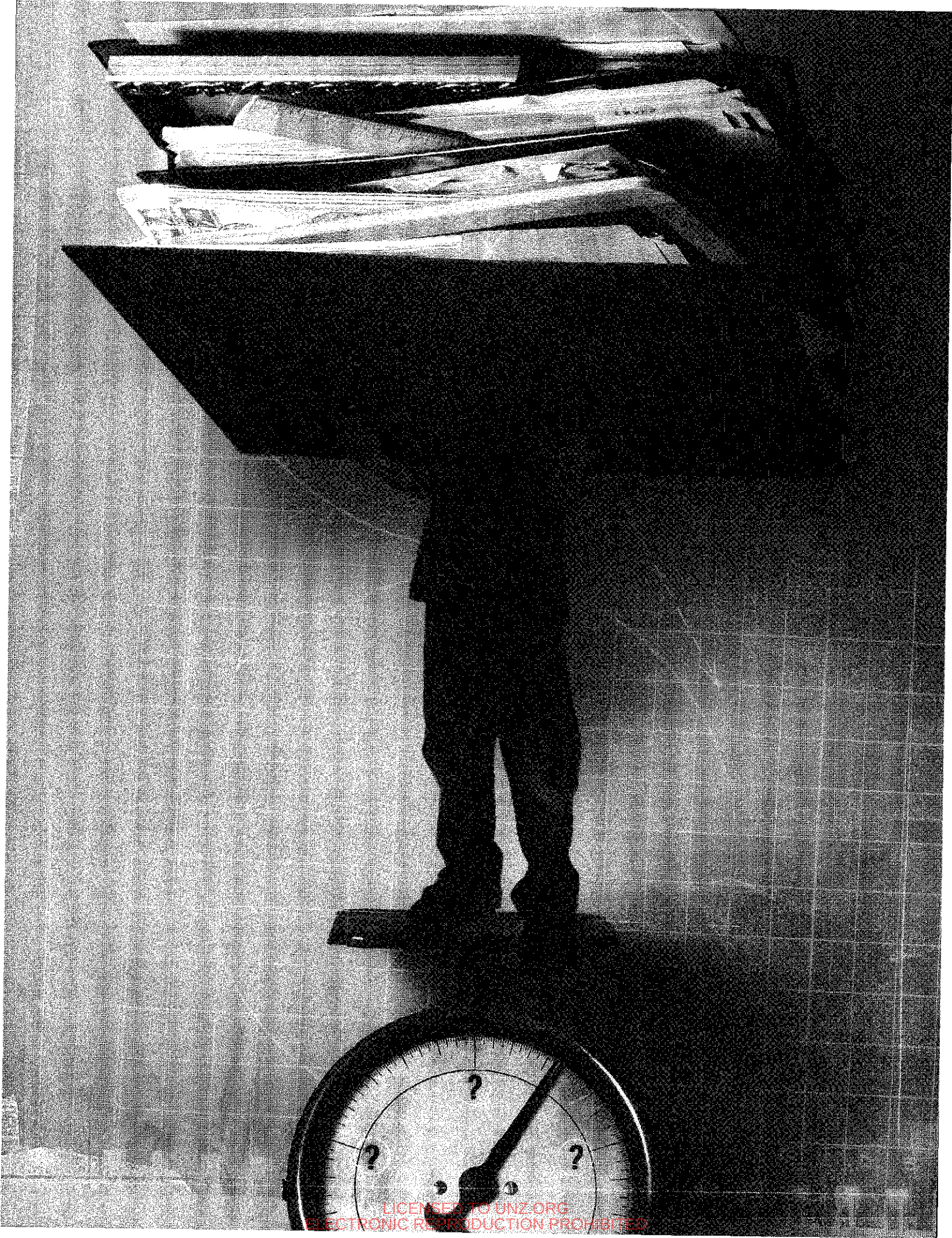

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Portfolio Assessment

Carrying less weight in the era of standards-based accountability

by JAY MATHEWS

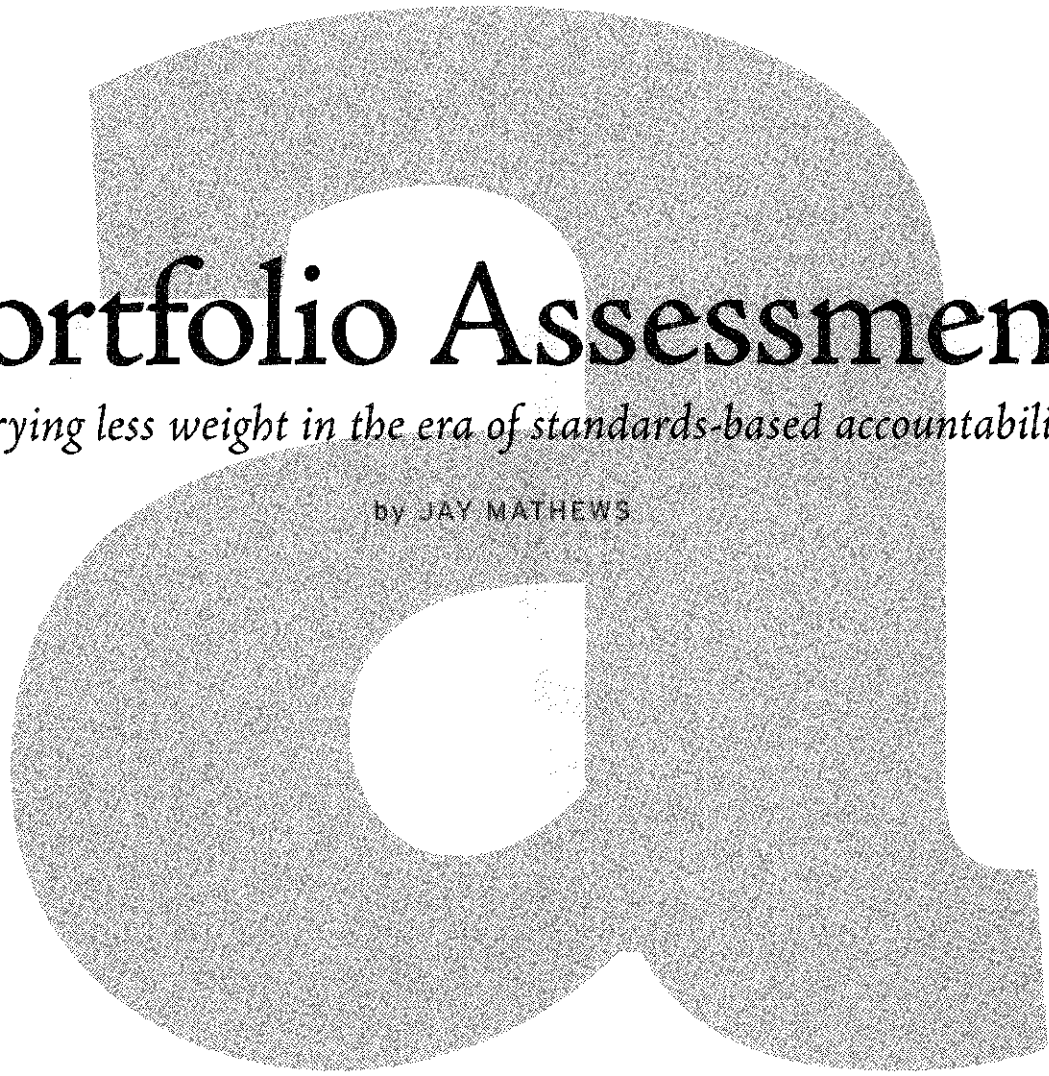

ILLUSTRATION BY STUART BRADFORD

At the Beacon School in Manhattan, the teachers and administrators thought they had resolved, at least to their satisfaction, the long national debate over how best to assess students' work. From the school's outset in 1993, Beacon's educators decided to treat their diverse student body, 26 percent of which comes from low-income families, like graduate students. Instead of taking the usual multiple-choice tests and receiving letter grades, the high schoolers would complete long-term projects and defend their work before faculty panels.

Beacon, a public alternative school, soon became a national model for advocates of what modern educators call "portfolio assessment." Portfolios, a term derived from the carrying case of paintings or drawings that artists present as proof of their talents, are collections of student work. As graduation time neared each year at Beacon, seniors had to present portfolios of their essays, lab reports, problem solutions, and research projects from the past three years—three projects in science, three in history, four in English, and three in foreign languages.

But when New York State began requiring students to pass the standardized Regents tests in order to graduate from high school, Beacon was forced to reduce the number of

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projects and cut the time for assessing them. For instance, principal Stephen Stoll says the biology course that had 70 labs a year ago now has only 30, because students need more time to learn the terms and concepts that will be on the Regents test.

With the nationwide efforts to raise graduation standards and the increasing use of standardized testing, the idea of basing promotion and graduation decisions on portfolios of students' work has fallen out of fashion as swiftly as slide rules gave way to calculators. Some schools have tried to keep portfolios as a tool for classroom teachers, but even the most ardent advocates have acknowledged that samples of student work cannot compete with the ability of standardized testing to quickly and cheaply determine the overall performance of a school or a school district.

Basing graduation decisions on portfolios of students' work has fallen out of fashion as swiftly as slide rules gave way to calculators.

"If the goal is simply to sort, stratify, and rank, portfolios add little if you already have test data," says Monty Neill, executive director of FairTest, a Massachusetts-based organization that opposes standardized testing. "If the goal is rich feedback at individual or school level, portfolios of some sort are indispensable while tests are of minimal use as they provide far too little information."

Waning Interest

The idea of authentic assessment—evaluating children based on an in-depth examination of their work rather than their scores on standardized tests—goes back a century, to the beginnings of the progressive education movement. Even then portfolios were considered time consuming, but the approach fit well with the progressives' emphasis on cultivating research skills and creative thinking rather than building a broad base of knowledge in the subject. Moreover, many teachers and students liked portfolios, and they became a key part of the alternative public schools that sprang up during the 1960s and 1970s.

At places like the famed Central Park East Secondary School in Manhattan, Deborah Meier and other progressive educators began to experiment with judging low-income inner-city students on the basis of collections of their best work and oral examinations. They found that if students did well on these alternative assessments, they gained admission to college and tended to do well there.

The National Writing Project, begun in 1974 at the University of California at Berkeley, stemmed from a similar notion: that regular reviews of the process of writing, with repeated drafts and frequent editing, were a better way to assess how the student was doing than the old way of grading grammar and spelling tests and the final version of any written assignment. Those series of drafts would be all an assessor needed to judge the student.

The portfolio idea gained strength in the 1980s. Drew Gitomer, vice president for research at the Educational Testing Service (ETS), worked on the Arts Propel project with Howard Gardner and Dennie Palmer Wolf of Harvard's Project Zero. "We explored the idea of portfolios in writing, music, and art—the latter for all students, not just the serious musicians/artists," Gitomer said. "These efforts, as well as many others, were focused on teachers and classrooms, rather than measures of accountability."

Even as several southern governors, including Richard Riley of South Carolina, James Hunt of North Carolina, and Bill Clinton of Arkansas, were working to spread the standards movement, which would become the most significant threat to portfolio assessment, some states experimented with portfolios on a large scale. Vermont and Kentucky investigated the possibility of using portfolio assessments instead of standardized tests to judge the progress of schools, districts, and the state. Some schools in both states piloted programs in which student work instead of multiple-choice tests was used to evaluate their academic progress.

But in 1994, RAND Corporation researcher Daniel Koretz, now at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, released a report on portfolio assessment in Vermont that many experts say dampened enthusiasm for this method of grading. Koretz found that portfolio assessment was not all that useful in evaluating schools or students because one school might require one kind of project, another school quite a different one. It was difficult to compare their work and determine whether the standards were high enough. Teachers, Koretz found, also complained that portfolios were cutting into valuable teaching time. Math teachers, he wrote, "frequently noted that portfolio activities take time away from basic skills and computation, which still need attention."

Koretz's careful methodology and national reputation had an impact, but there were signs that portfolios were already losing ground. Around the same time as the report's release, British prime minister John Major discarded the portfolio system that had been used for 20 years as the nation's graduation exam in English. Dylan Wiliam, a British assessment expert who now works for ETS, said Major felt "that

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timed written examinations were the fairest way to assess achievement at the end of compulsory schooling." Nevertheless, about 40 percent of the English exam grade and 20 percent of the math grade is still based on portfolio-like elements.

Middle Ground

The decline of portfolios as a large-scale accountability measure is not necessarily a bad thing, Gitomer said. "The power of portfolios resides in its coming out of the student's own classroom practice. The value resides in the wealth of information available and the various conversations that one can have about the work and the portfolio creator. If all you're going to do is give a single score, there are far more efficient ways of getting at a student's achievement level."

Ronald Wolk, founder of the newspaper *Education Week*, said he appreciates the need for large-scale assessments, but thinks the standardized tests that are replacing portfolios are no easier to judge than actual student work. "Officials object to using portfolios for assessment because they are too subjective," said Wolk, who admires the Beacon School's grading system. "But that is exactly how the writing on Regents exams is scored. Teachers read and grade the exams according to their best judgment. At Beacon, at least, the teachers use rubrics that they have crafted and honed over the years."

Most critics of portfolio assessment say they like the emphasis on demonstrated writing and oral skill, but have seen too many instances in which a refusal to give traditional tests of factual recall leads to charmingly written essays with little concrete information to support their arguments.

Advocates of portfolios respond that such lapses can be blamed on bad teaching, but not on the use of portfolios, since if portfolios are used properly they can also lead students to master a broad range of material. Neill said the idea is to collect key pieces that provide evidence of learning in key areas. Even with a standard high-school grading system, he said, "unless all children take precisely the same curriculum, and master it to a similar degree, and then recall it all, they will come into any college course with different aspects of knowledge and different gaps in that knowledge."

At Beacon, Stoll said the faculty is trying to maintain the portfolio system in a limited form, "but it is hard. You have the teacher telling the student to get his portfolio done and he says that he is studying for the Regents test. It is like mixing two different currencies, and the bad currency drives out the good currency in a certain sense." Beacon's request to be exempt from the Regents tests was turned down by Richard P. Mills, New York's commissioner of education, who had tried portfolio assessments when he was the state school superintendent in Vermont.

The refusal to give tests of factual recall leads to charmingly written essays with little support for their arguments, say critics.

The argument between advocates of standardized tests and advocates of portfolios usually ends with each side saying it cannot trust the results produced by the other. Authentic assessment "is costly indeed, and slow and cumbersome," said Chester E. Finn Jr., president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and a supporter of standardized testing, "but I think its biggest flaw as an external assessment is its subjectivity and unreliability."

Robert Holland, a senior fellow at the Lexington Institute, a Virginia-based think tank, raised the issue of cheating. "Scorers may have no way to tell if the work samples came from a student or a smart uncle or from an Internet download," he said. Portfolio supporters note that regular tests have also produced cheating incidents.

Lisa Graham Keegan, chief executive officer of the Washington-based Education Leaders Council, said she thinks portfolios can help teachers assess their students' progress, but are not a good tool for determining how a school or a district is doing. She remembers a visit to a northern Arizona school where "the writing teacher was showing me a portfolio of a student's work in which the student was writing about kamikaze pilots during World War II." Keegan was state school superintendent for Arizona at the time and saw that "the essay was horribly written, with glaring spelling and grammatical errors, and yet had received a score of 23 out of 25 points.

"The teacher was just glowing with what a mature and moving topic the student had chosen without any direction from her. I was less impressed and said so—something along the lines of how I could appreciate that the student had something interesting to say, but my first impression was that he didn't know how to say it—and wasn't that the first order task for the teacher?"

Having students display their personal strengths is fine, Keegan said, as long as they still learn to read, write, and do math capably before they graduate. "A collection of student work can be incredibly valuable," she said, "but it cannot replace an objective and systematic diagnostic program. Hopefully, we will come to a place where we incorporate both."

–Jay Mathews is a reporter and columnist at the Washington Post and the author, most recently, of Harvard Schmarvard: Getting Beyond the Ivy League to the College That Is Best for You *(2003).*

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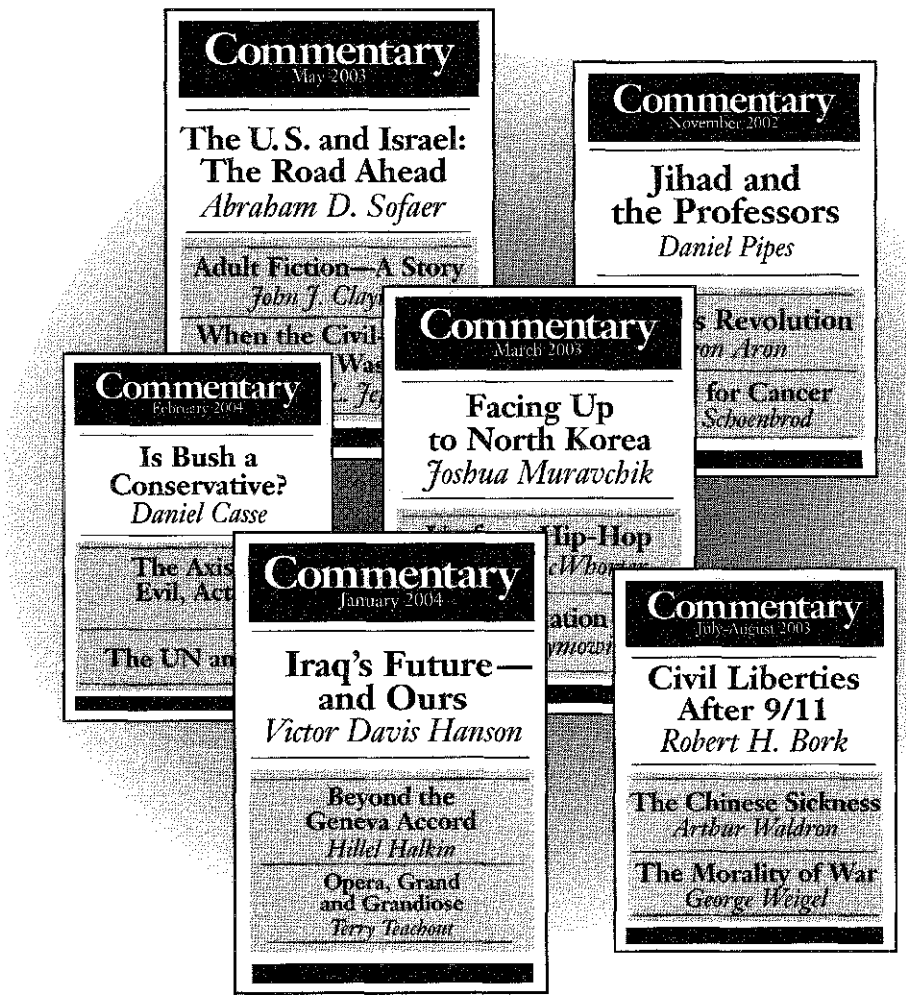
—Jeane J. Kirkpatrick



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Equally Mediocre

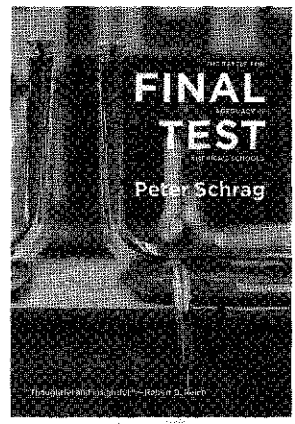
The ineptitude of court-driven school reform

Final Test: The Battle for Adequacy in America's Schools

By Peter Schrag

New Press, 2003, $25.95; 288 pgs.

Reviewed by William A. Fischel



Peter Schrag's *Final Test* describes how judicial rulings in state courts are transforming the way American public schools are financed. The pioneer in the brave new world of school finance was the California Supreme Court, which in the 1971 *Serrano* decision found that local property taxation was an inequitable means of funding public schools. The court ordered the state to simultaneously equalize tax bases and spending per pupil. Implementation of this idea was furthered in 1978 by Proposition 13, which, by capping property-tax rates and assessments, forced California to use statewide taxes to finance local schools.

California thus produced an "equitable" system at a comparatively low level of spending. As a consequence, Schrag argues, California's achievement levels are now similar to Mississippi's. To avoid this outcome, a new wave of school-finance litigation has instead endorsed an "adequacy" claim based on state constitutional clauses that exhort the legislature to provide for a "thorough and efficient" (or similar language) system of education. The current method of financing public education, plaintiffs argue, has left poor and minority students with inadequate schools. The goal is to "level up" the poorer schools by focusing on standards as well as the fairness of local taxation.

Final Test takes readers on a tour of states in which the adequacy approach has had some success. Schrag, formerly the editor of the *Sacramento Bee*'s opinion page, puts his journalistic talent to good use. Readers learn about not only the courtroom action but also the events leading up to the cases and what happened afterward. Schrag is to be commended for his willingness to describe how the sausage meat of school-finance litigation is manufactured.

California produced an "equitable" system at a low level of achievement.

The problem for some readers will be Schrag's open enthusiasm for this movement. He goes admirably beyond trial transcripts and news stories by interviewing participants in the litigation and its implementation. His sources, however, are heavily weighted toward the plaintiff side, and his most caustic comments are reserved for governors who hire lawyers who actually want to defend their school systems.

Schrag offers extensive coverage of cases in California, Kentucky, New Jersey, Ohio, Alabama, North Carolina, Maryland, and New York. California's latest litigation, *Williams v. California*, is still under way, and Schrag devotes his opening chapter to its proceedings. The strategy of the plaintiff's lawyers in this and other cases might be abbreviated "TTT," for "Trailing the Terminex Truck." The lawyers actively look for school conditions like toilets that do not work and vermin in the basement that will "shock the conscience" of the judge trying the case.

To his credit, Schrag raises the validity of the TTT strategy with lawyers for the California plaintiffs. The lawyers admit that the conditions are not really the central issue, but they use them nonetheless because they believe that (in a quote attributed to "someone") "dumbing things down for judges" is necessary to get their attention.

This puts into sharp relief the issue of why school reform has been channeled through the courts. State supreme court judges are hardly philosopher kings. They usually know considerably less about public schools than state legislators, who are at least in touch with their local constituents and who sometimes start their political careers on a local school board.

A more profound problem with using the judiciary as a vehicle for school-finance reform is the inherently undemocratic nature of the courts. Schrag has little patience, though, with judicial deference. His ideal process is what lawyers call a "friendly suit," in which both sides actually want the same outcome. He most admires Kentucky, where establishment politicians

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organized the litigation, the state deliberately put up a weak defense in which the governor actually switched to the plaintiff's side, and the legislature responded to the court's sweeping demand to restructure the entire system with a 20 percent increase in the sales tax rate.

There's one party absent from this happy picture of democracy's institutions' joining hands to fix things: the voters. Now this may be no loss for Schrag, who is skeptical of their capacities, but it does make one wonder who is being served by all this. If the voters really wanted sweeping school reform, their duly elected representatives could have given it to them without the court having ordered it. Voters' approval, of course, is not the same as the "right thing to do," but if government is spending the voters' money, it seems reasonable to ask their permission. Feeding the poor may be the right thing to do, but its rectitude is compromised if one takes food from the farmers without asking their permission.

If government is spending the voters' money, it seems reasonable to ask their permission.

Written in Stone

The practical problem with using the courts to bypass the voters is that judges have to ground their rulings in state constitutions, whose hortatory education clauses are the basis for their intervention. The decisions thus chart a particular approach to education that cannot be changed without constitutional amendment or reversal by a later court. Had these reforms emerged from purely legislative initiatives, they could be reversed easily if it became evident that they were not working as planned or if a better approach had been discovered in later years.

A sad example is California's *Serrano* decision. It enshrined as constitutional doctrine the idea that local property-tax bases were to be the common property of the state, not the locality, for funding education. Implementation of tax-base sharing was soon shown to penalize a majority of the state's poor and African-American students, who are concentrated in large urban districts where the property wealth is higher than the state average. Had this huge error been grounded solely in legislation, it could have been easily remedied. However, having enshrined tax-base equalization as constitutional principle, California and numerous other states that have invoked it will be stuck with it for a long time.

Schrag's keenest insight is that any individual court decision is merely a way station on a cycle of litigation, legislation, and litigation yet again. For instance, New York's highest court threw out an equity suit in 1982, but the plaintiffs later regrouped around the adequacy principle. They prevailed at the trial level but were reversed on intermediate appeal. After *Final Test* was published, the New York Court of Appeals (the state's highest court) ruled for the plaintiffs.

Rest assured that the last decision has not been made in New York. And Schrag finds little to lament in this. What others call judicial tyranny he calls dialogue, and he is not entirely wrong about that. It is an odd way, though, for an allegedly self-governing people to manage their schools.

Schrag's weakest point is his grasp of social-science methodology. He does cite the leading economist in this area, Eric Hanushek, at considerable length. The gravamen of Hanushek's 30 years of research is that public schools are notoriously inefficient at converting additional dollars into improved student learning. Nonetheless, Schrag concludes from far less reliable sources that the additional money that adequacy litigation brings will help public education.

Competition Needed

Schrag's dismissal of Hanushek's findings is not entirely gratuitous. Hanushek has not attempted to explain *why* additional funds have so little effect on student outcomes. But Harvard's Caroline Hoxby (who is not cited in this book) has a decade's worth of research that provides an answer. Hoxby finds that education is not much different from other industries. If there is competition among many public school districts and private schools in a given geographic area, the schools will offer better services at a lower cost. Even students in the poorest districts appear to do better in a competitive system, as exists in the Boston area, than they do in areas in which one or two districts dominate a metropolitan area, like Miami.

Hoxby's attention to market structure may offer an explanation for the apparent ineffectiveness of increased spending on education. Since the early 1970s, much additional funding for education has come from state rather than local sources. Increases in state funds usually come with strings that

Any individual court decision is merely a way station on a cycle of litigation and legislation.

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hamper the ability of an individual district to hire better teachers, adopt new technology, and respond to parental demands. Thus even in situations where the number of competing districts is great, the districts' ability to behave like suppliers in a competitive market is hobbled by the additional regulations that inevitably arrive with the new subsidies.

A related problem is that school-finance cases often require the state to send more money to schools that already hold a monopolistic position. The most troubled schools, as Schrag demonstrates, are those in the largest districts. They are essentially governed by entrenched bureaucracies and teacher unions. The quality of the schools suffers as a result. By steering funds to the least effective districts, school-finance litigation may have added to Hanushek's evidence that additional money is ineffective in improving education.

What is effective then? Competition, whether it comes from vouchers, independent private schools, public charter schools, or the breaking up of oversize districts, is the tonic to which Hoxby's work most clearly points. In smaller school districts and in private schools, parents have more say about curriculum and the evaluation of teachers. Administrators will listen to them in competitive situations because if they don't, the parents can move their child to another school or another district. Hoxby's evidence indicates that competition would meet the demands of state constitutions for a "thorough and efficient" education system better than the lawyer-engineered, centralized outcomes that are so eagerly sought by the advocates of adequacy.

–William A. Fischel is a professor of economics at Dartmouth College.

Quality Curricula

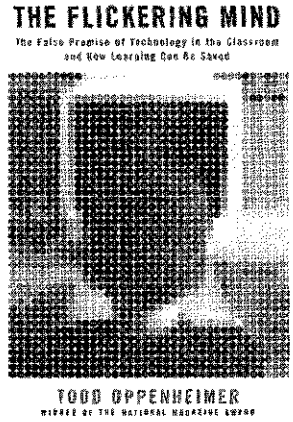
The timeless technology

The Flickering Mind: The False Promise of Technology in the Classroom and How Learning Can Be Saved

By Todd Oppenheimer

Random House, 2003, $26.95; 512 pgs.

Reviewed by Brian Nelson



In 1997 Todd Oppenheimer published a widely read *Atlantic Monthly* article, "The Computer Delusion," that painted a provocative portrait of technology's failure to improve education thus far. The article outlined a long history of high expectations and underwhelming results and made Oppenheimer a well known if controversial figure in the field of education.

In *The Flickering Mind*, Oppenheimer amplifies his earlier theme by visiting schools around the country to get a firsthand glimpse of how technology is or is not working in schools. In general, Oppenheimer does not like what he sees. *The Flickering Mind* offers a grim image not only of educational technology but also of modern schooling altogether. Oppenheimer denounces a cast of anti-heroes who he claims, through duplicity or stupidity, are destroying education.

The lead villains in *The Flickering Mind* are the hardware and software companies that hawk their products to schools. Corporations such as Apple, IBM, and Microsoft are portrayed as "self-interested manipulators" out to swindle "naïve" administrators and "gullible" teachers by foisting worthless technology on them.

To Oppenheimer, the central crime perpetrated by these businesses seems to be the very fact that they are businesses; they charge something for their products. Oppenheimer frequently juxtaposes the marketing slogans—improved learning! students who love school!—against the costs of implementing and maintaining classroom technology. The implication is that because businesses have a financial interest in selling technology, their claims regarding the educational value of their products cannot be trusted. No doubt technology firms, primarily interested in earning a buck, can sometimes make overblown claims. Most, however, probably believe in their products and hope to make a positive difference.

Nevertheless, Oppenheimer does an excellent job of highlighting the futility of simply throwing money at a problem. In case after case, he finds that schools have spent huge sums on technology at the expense of more pressing needs. He ruefully recounts tales of gleaming computer labs in crumbling buildings, purchased with funds that could have gone to art, music, shop, and teachers' salaries.

Oppenheimer derides schools that blow the budget on late-model computers and software with no thought to maintaining them or training teach-

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ers in how to use them. Maintenance of the machines often falls on a few harried technology workers who scramble from school to school or even a single enthusiastic teacher who operates as the default school network administrator, software buyer, and curriculum designer. New computer labs sit idle because overworked teachers have neither the time nor the training needed to make use of them.

These implementation problems are secondary, however, to Oppenheimer's belief that technology actually has little role to play in schools. He argues that there are fundamental weaknesses in the curricula delivered through technology. At various points in the book, he dismisses technology-supported, project-based learning; collaborative group work; computer-based simulations; and Internet-based research. In the face of teachers' happy claims, he sees only noisy "chaos."

The book's lead villains are the technology companies that hawk their products to schools.

Oppenheimer's opinions may reveal more about his personal outlook on modern education than about the value of technology in schools. Though he objects to this characterization, he clearly yearns to return to the education system of an idealized yesteryear. In one technology-heavy school, the only class Oppenheimer enjoys has a teacher lecturing to orderly rows of silent students, heads bent down and taking notes. He lauds aspects of project-based learning, but maligns it when it involves the use of technology.

For example, Oppenheimer admires traditional textbook-based research projects and "leafing methodically through a solid book," but dismisses Internet-based research projects as lacking intellectual content. Material on the worldwide web, he claims, is often difficult to find, low in quality, and not easily understood by students. Furthermore, Oppenheimer complains that few of the PowerPoint presentations students design in lieu of more traditional paper-based reports show any depth or creativity. Where computers have failed, Oppenheimer hopes homespun projects featuring (among other things) knitting, pinecones, and homemade crayons will save the day.

Oppenheimer's antipathy toward

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modern pedagogy is further reflected in the few uses of technology he finds effective. His vision for "how learning can be saved" boils down to using computers as supplemental tools in support of traditional, teacher-led classroom activities.

For example, he advocates a "one computer per classroom" approach, in which teachers carefully guide groups of students through software programs. While this approach has some benefits in keeping kids on task, Oppenheimer seems to support it primarily because it moves the teacher back to center stage and eliminates the inherent messiness of allowing students some measure of control over their own learning. Because he rejects the notion of a student-centered, collaborative pedagogy, Oppenheimer necessarily also rejects the use of technology to support such learning.

Oppenheimer clearly yearns to return to the education system of an idealized yesteryear.

While Oppenheimer's complaints about the poor quality of most software and computer-supported curricula are on target, it is difficult to place the blame on technology. When describing computer-based projects that are inventive and motivating, Oppenheimer is quick to point out that similar projects could be done without computers. But when discussing poor curriculum, he links low quality directly to technology. He can't have it both ways. If good curriculum is good, with or without technology, the same must be true of bad curriculum.

Most day-to-day activities in regular classrooms are no more or less inspired than their technology-supported counterparts. The reality of public schooling in the United States is that it has always had to aim at the middle. In trying to help most students learn pretty well most of the time, outstanding curriculum is going to be the exception rather than the rule. The promise of educational technology, as yet unfilled, is that such exceptions can become the norm.

–Brian Nelson is a doctoral student and instructor in the Technology in Education program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

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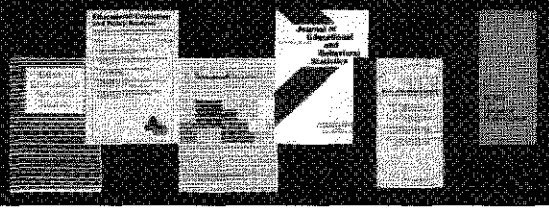

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Creative Accounting

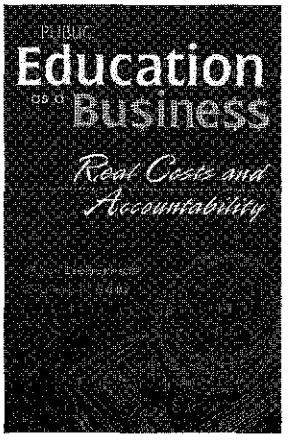
Measuring the true cost of K–12 education

Public Education as a Business: Real Costs and Accountability

By Myron Lieberman & Charlene Haar

Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, $32.95; 248 pgs.

Reviewed by Michael Podgursky



The focus of *Public Education as a Business* comes after the colon: the real costs of K–12 public schooling. In this slim volume, the authors propose to improve the way "cost" is traditionally measured in public K–12 education. They point out that most evaluations of school performance focus solely on outcomes, such as students' test scores or high-school graduation rates. Rarely do studies of school reforms consider the costs or compare alternative approaches in order to determine which is the most cost-efficient. However, the accurate measuring of costs is a crucial aspect of policy analysis.

Myron Lieberman and Charlene Haar, chairman and president, respectively, of the Washington, D.C.–based Education Policy Institute, embrace the economist's concept of cost—the opportunity cost of all the resources forgone. For instance, if a city grants the school system use of a vacant government building, the cost of inhabiting the building is frequently not charged to the schools. But a proper measure of costs would account for the opportunity cost of the city government's allowing use of a building for free when it could have rented it out, earning significant revenue for the space. Such social costs are routinely omitted from the data on school spending that are reported by various levels of government.

By contrast, when a business like Wal-Mart computes its costs, it must properly account for the cost of the capital tied up in the business—the land, buildings, and inventories. Costs also include the depreciation of this capital over the course of its useful life. If a building has a 20-year life, then some measure of that depreciation must be included in an annual measure of costs. The authors make clear that our measures of the cost of public education—even the "total cost" measures reported by the U.S. Department of Education—understate the true costs due to inadequate measures of the total capital stock of public schools (land, buildings, information technology) and of depreciation.

Lieberman and Haar also examine K–12 education costs that are absorbed by other agencies of government (including higher education) as well as the costs of revenue collection and the disincentive effects associated with levying taxes to pay for the schools (what economists term "deadweight loss").

The true cost of teachers' pensions is also seldom reflected in government data on school spending. Generous early retirement schemes passed by legislatures in the 1990s, combined with a surge in teacher hiring and the bear market in stocks, have produced massive unfunded liabilities in these pension funds. Jon Fullerton (see "Mounting Debt," *Forum*, Winter 2004) notes that the unfunded pension liability of the Los Angeles Unified School District alone is $4.8 billion. Lieberman and Haar describe other urban school district and state plans that are awash in red ink.

For this reason, several states have moved to so-called "defined contribution" pension plans, for which employers have no liabilities beyond their current contributions. Since virtually the entire private business sector and most public and private institutions of higher education have moved to defined contribution systems (such as private-sector 401k plans) for their professional employees, the defined benefit plans offered by public school districts seem like a very expensive anachronism.

Fortunately, some significant public accounting changes are in the works. A private body, the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB), is implementing guidelines to make accounting in government agencies more accurate, consistent, and transparent.

The net effect of these changes will be to make expenditure data from public schools more consistent with the economic concept of cost. These GASB reforms are motivated in part by pressures from the financial community, specifically bond-rating companies, which seek better data on school district finances as a basis for assessing the quality of the debt they issue.

Given the lively policy debates and litigation surrounding school finance, it is surprising that scholars have not done a better job of measuring the social cost of public elementary and secondary education. One can only hope that Lieberman and Haar's careful scholarship will stimulate further research in this area.

–Michael Podgursky is a professor of economics at the University of Missouri–Columbia.

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BOOK ALERT

Common Sense School Reform, by Frederick M. Hess (Palgrave Macmillan). Common sense suggests that educators, like everyone else, are more effective when given the flexibility to innovate and held accountable for their performance. Unfortunately, as our own executive editor Frederick Hess demonstrates, common sense is a tool rarely used in school reform. Much of what passes for "reform" protects a status quo in which success is seldom rewarded and failures go unpunished.

Hess uses examples from within education and beyond to suggest new approaches to issues as diverse as school choice, teacher compensation, and the use of technology. His recommendations represent a comprehensive reform agenda that policymakers would be ill-advised to ignore.

The War Against Excellence: The Rising Tide of Mediocrity in America's Middle Schools, by Cheri Pierson Yecke (Praeger). Yecke, Minnesota's embattled education commissioner, targets two trends: the "middle-school movement" and public education's growing hostility toward the needs of gifted youngsters.

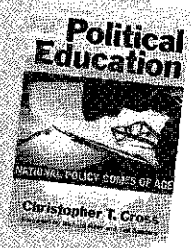
Both trends began as well-meaning impulses. The middle-school movement sought to place adolescents in environments that would be sensitive to their developmental needs and, in contrast to traditional junior high schools, would focus on "teaching the child, not the subject." The neglect of giftedness arose from the belief that any extra resources should be devoted to kids who are falling behind in school.

As with so many good intentions, however, these went badly awry. They turned into a profound anti-intellectualism that surely underlies both the decline in student achievement after 4th grade and our spotty record in nurturing tomorrow's leaders.

Mayors in the Middle: Politics, Race, and Mayoral Control of Urban Schools, edited by Jeffrey Henig and Wilbur Rich (Princeton). A provocative collection of case studies on the consequences of increased mayoral control over the schools, featuring studies of Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Boston, and Washington, D.C. The cases are somewhat uneven. Some, like the studies of D.C. and Boston, illuminate the politics and practice of mayoral control, but the volume as a whole doesn't set out to make the case for or against mayoral control. On balance the book is a useful and measured contribution to a complicated question.

The New Accountability: High Schools and High-Stakes Testing, edited by Martin Carnoy, Richard Elmore, and Leslie Santee Siskin (RoutledgeFalmer). States are increasingly requiring students to pass an exam in order to graduate from high school. This volume includes a series of thoughtful chapters on the practice of this "new accountability." The central argument is that "accountability systems work—when they work—by calling forth energy, motivation, commitment, knowledge, and skill" from educators. Accountability cannot compel schools to improve, the editors argue, but it can complement more traditional reforms. They call for greater attention to capacity-building, professional development, and curriculum. Sensible warnings, but delivered with the depressing and potentially misguided subtext that policy can do no more than provide tools in the hope that educators will utilize them.

Political Education: National Policy Comes of Age, by Christopher T. Cross (Teachers College). Veteran Washington education operative Christopher Cross chronicles the making of federal education policy from the Truman administration to the present. Cross adeptly covers the creation of the federal Department of Education and provides perceptive and fair mini-portraits of the tenures of several secretaries of education. The book's shortcomings are its *que sera, sera* view of the current state of federal education policy and its unimaginative musings on the future. But readers will come away with enhanced understanding of what got us where we are today.



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by JOSHUA DAVEY

Faith in the Law

The Supreme Court upholds religious discrimination

On February 25, I lost a case before the U.S. Supreme Court. I had lost at the district court level as well, but a victory in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals had lifted my hopes. What's more, a ruling in my favor seemed a natural extension of the Supreme Court's 2002 decision upholding Cleveland's school voucher program in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*. Alas, it was not to be.

The road to my lawsuit, *Locke v. Davey*, began more than four years ago, when the state of Washington revoked my "Promise Scholarship." The scholarship was available to students from low- and middle-income families who finished in the top 10 percent of their graduating classes and enrolled at a college in Washington State. Only in October of my freshman year at Northwest College did I learn that my decision to major in church ministry ran afoul of the state constitution's ban on public support for religious instruction.

I believed that the state's exclusion of theology majors from the Promise Scholarship program was wrong, both as a matter of constitutional law, which guarantees the free exercise of religion, and as a matter of social policy, which ought to promote freedom and equality and prevent religious discrimination. Accordingly, I decided to take a principled stand against what I considered a grave injustice. I kept my major, thus forfeiting my scholarship.

I soon contacted the American Center for Law and Justice, a public-interest law firm that specializes in religious liberties litigation. With their pro bono representation, I sued several Washington officials, among them Governor Gary Locke, arguing that the state's exclusion of theology majors from the Promise Scholarship program violated my rights to free speech, free exercise of religion, and equal protection under the laws.

The scholarship money was never my primary motivation in the suit. At less than $3,000, the funds were a relatively small portion of the total cost of a college education. Much more important was my desire to fight injustice, to force the state to end its discrimination against theology majors, and to secure state aid for thousands of students like myself.

I was 19 then, largely ignorant of the law and without appreciation for the importance of the constitutional questions raised in my case. I certainly never imagined my case would be heard by the Supreme Court. As my legal drama unfolded, though, it began to have a profound impact on my own education and career goals. My focus shifted from the ministry to law. After graduating from college in 2003, I began my first year at Harvard Law School. To some, it might seem as if ministry and law could not be more removed from one another or even that it would be impossible to be both a good lawyer and a faithful Christian.

The very same motivations that led me toward the ministry now lead me toward the law.

To me, nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, the very same motivations that led me toward the ministry—a desire to live out my faith in a practical way, to help others, and to make a positive contribution to society—now lead me toward the law.

As it turned out, I did not attain my goals in filing suit; Washington and other states are free to bar theology majors from all forms of state financial aid as a result of the Supreme Court's decision. The decision is a tremendous disappointment, on a personal level and because a great injustice has been done. Still, I have no regrets. Despite my loss, the fight for religious freedom and equal access to education will continue, and I am only strengthened in my resolve to further those goals.

–Joshua Davey is a rising second-year student at Harvard Law School.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICH FRISHMAN

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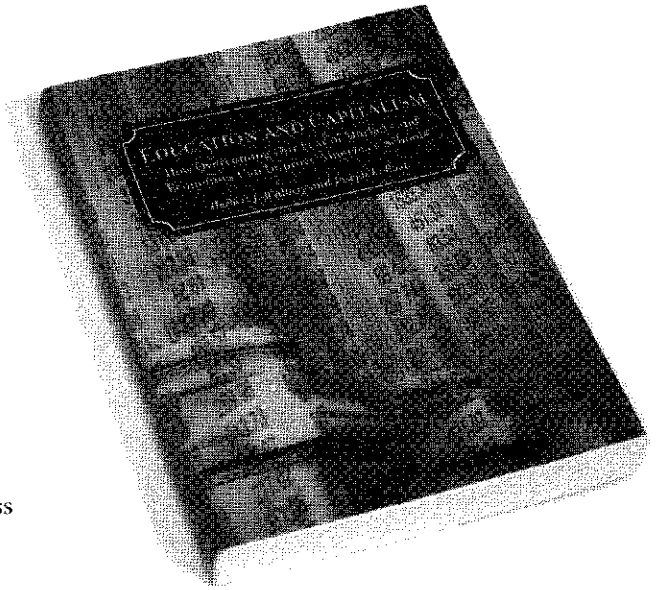
Can Markets and Economics Improve America's Schools?



Education and Capitalism

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Published by The Hoover Press

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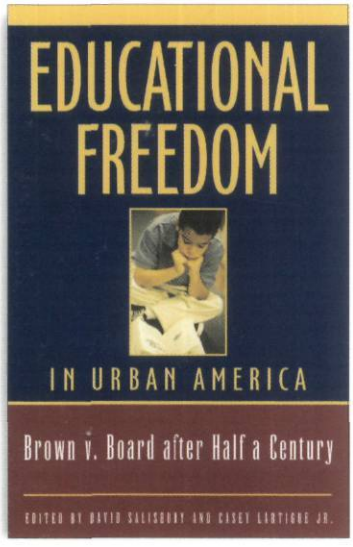
EDUCATIONAL FREEDOM
IN URBAN AMERICA
Brown v. Board after Half a Century
EDITED BY DAVID SALISBURY AND CASEY LARTIGUE JR.

May 2004, 342 pages
$24.95 cloth, ISBN: 1-930865-56-2

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